

Dawning of the Digital Age in the Family History Department, 1995–2011

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Dawning of the Digital Age

The Family History Department (hereafter department) of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints began as the Genealogical Society of Utah. In 1894, the Church incorporated this society to assist in discovering and documenting ancestral lineages. Today, the department, operating under the trade name FamilySearch, enables the general public to trace their ancestral past, collaborate with each other in their research, and then document and preserve their research findings. Church members can also submit the names of their ancestors for the purpose of performing temple ordinances in behalf of those ancestors. The Church has begun to emphasize the urgency of this task and to employ digital technology to accomplish it. At the centennial celebration of the formation of the Genealogical Society of Utah, held in the Tabernacle on Temple Square on November 13, 1994, President Howard W. Hunter declared:

“In recent years we have begun using information technology to hasten the sacred work of providing ordinances for the deceased. The role of technology in this work has been accelerated by the Lord himself, who has had a guiding hand in its development and will continue to do so. However, we stand only on the threshold of what we can do with these tools. I feel that our most enthusiastic projections can capture only a tiny glimpse of how these tools can help us—and the eternal consequences of these efforts.”¹

Since that time, the Family History Department has fielded systems to accomplish this purpose, reflecting the most concentrated software and hardware development effort in the history of the Church. This history documents the department’s transition to the digital age at the dawn of the 21st century.

The Church’s first involved itself with computer-based family history research in 1969, developing GIANT, a first-generation automated system for genealogy, a massive engineering task in its day.² Later, the Church developed two flagship products: (1) FamilySearch, which distributed compiled research and temple ordinance data, and (2) TempleReady, which partially automated the process of name submission for temple work.³ Reflecting the technology of that day, these DOS programs could only be used offline in the Family History Library, affiliate centers that could order microfilms (known as family history centers), some public institutions, and a few homes. Following the development of these products, the department entered a period in which it maintained these products rather than pursuing new initiatives.

In addition to maintaining those products, the Family History Department focused through 2001 on buying rather than building technology, less expensive but not necessarily innovative.⁴ The department did not make this decision unilaterally. The Church had other technology initiatives that drew funding away from family history. In 1994, Reynolds J. Cahoon, the managing director who had been heavily involved in fielding the products mentioned above, lamented that the Church funded information technology for Church-level projects, leaving little for department-initiated work.⁵ In 1995, the Executive Directors of the department discussed a possible loss of department technology personnel in the following year, due to the small number of projects approved for 1996.⁶

From 1995 to 1999, the department produced a few relatively inexpensive computer products in conjunction with commercial vendors in an effort to reduce costs and avoid long-term system maintenance. The momentum to alter this approach began at the end of the decade as the Internet offered new ways of providing worldwide access to information housed in Salt Lake City. The Church began to invest resources in department initiatives, which resulted in FamilySearch Internet, an important step in transforming the world of family history for both the Church and the world.

After the release of FamilySearch Internet in 1999, the spirit of innovation surged in meetings of the Executive Directors. The idea of a single file that could combine genealogical and ordinance data—a long-term dream—emerged again. A study conducted in 1999 envisioned a single user interface that could deliver genealogical and ordinance information, clear names for the temple, prompt the user to do ordinances not yet performed, and handle multiple, conflicting opinions. All of this would eventually make “well-documented pedigree lines [that were] unalterable.”⁷

In 2001, the Executive Directors embarked on a renewed effort to create a “seamless process . . . to identify ancestral names, link them into families, and provide temple ordinances for them.” At the time, the department struggled along on a limited budget for a pioneering effort to accomplish this purpose, known as Family Ordinance Summary (discussed in chapter 1. In April 2001, the Executive Directors presented to the First Presidency the concept of a new system that would “include a lineage-linked central ordinance file accessed through the Internet and designed to prevent duplication, simplify the clearing of temple ordinances for members, and make ordinance dates available much sooner.”⁸ The First Presidency approved the concept and the expanded budget requirements. The 2001 department budget more than doubled the expenditure of the previous year.⁹ The department had crossed the threshold into an epic period of technological advancement.

During the period from 1995 to 2011, the department created family history products and services to assist Church members in accomplishing four basic purposes: (1) document ancestral genealogies and prepare names for temple ordinances, (2) access names from digitized and indexed images of family history records and data compiled from research, (3) support and develop skills among Church members and in the genealogical community, and (4) collaborate with other institutions in promoting and supporting family history work. These were not new directions but a continuation of efforts through 1994. The progress made in each of these areas by the end of 1994 is outlined in the following paragraphs.

Document Genealogies and Prepare Names for Temple Ordinances. By the end of 1994, Church members prepared names for temple ordinances in 46 temples. The DOS version of TempleReady had just been released Church wide, transferring the responsibility of clearing names for the temple from the Church to its members. As an offline system, TempleReady compared name submissions with ordinances published annually on compact discs. Offline publication meant that the file was current only on the day of publication and thereafter incomplete until republication. A new manual detailing how to clear and submit names, *A Member's Guide to Temple and Family History Work*, had been published and translated into

Spanish, Portuguese, Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish, with French and Italian neared publication at the end of the year, but distributed only as a printed product.

Records Access. The department acquired records solely by microfilming. To better manage the microfilm effort, a new microfilm camera operator's manual had been completed. In addition, a DOS program, known as Universal Data Entry, had been deployed to initiate the indexing of records. The indexing of the 1881 British census, the largest indexing project ever attempted up to that point by the department in cooperation with another organization, was well underway. Access to compiled data in Ancestral File and the International Genealogical Index (IGI) was through FamilySearch DOS, available primarily on computers in the Family History Library and family history centers. In January, the department released Personal Ancestral File (PAF) 2.3, a DOS program that enabled individuals to compile and manage genealogical information on personal computers.

Genealogical Community and Member Support. A headquarters unit answered telephone calls to assist people using family history products. The department supported research primarily at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. People unable to visit the Family History Library could obtain research support from the department only by reading library publications and correspondence with library staff. Research outlines had been published for many states and countries, with outlines for Germany and Ireland being published in 1994. A multiyear project to write an operations manual for family history centers neared to completion. Virtually all publications and telephone assistance was done in English. The priesthood and area support unit at headquarters coordinated family history work with Area Presidencies in supporting family history work locally. The department had little direct contact with members to provide the needed family history expertise. Members relied on priesthood leaders, who often lacked this expertise.

Collaboration and Marketing. With the exception of the indexing program, the Family History Department operated on its own, without attempting to engage other groups and individuals in its work. For the centennial celebration of the creation of the Family History Department, the Church authored and broadcasted radio and television spots on family history themes. The department mounted displays in the Family History Library and FamilySearch Center, created portable displays for use at genealogical conferences worldwide describing its purpose and programs, and published a centennial history titled *Hearts Turned to the Fathers: A History of the Genealogical Society of Utah, 1894–1994*.

In summary, by 1994 the department (1) supported name submission, in numerous manual steps, to 46 temples in an offline computer environment, (2) acquired and distributed images solely on microfilm and indexed but did not digitize records, (3) supported English-speaking Church members and the genealogical community with offline programs and paper publications, paying only minimal attention to its international audiences, and (4) cooperated modestly with other institutions and published its message through limited training and publicity efforts. The department had done well with available resources and technologies, but advanced computer, digital, and communication technologies, along with an increased

commitment of Church resources, would soon transform the work of the department as envisioned by President Hunter in 1994. From 1995 to 2011, prodigious efforts and impressive advances were made in accomplishing the four basic purposes of the Family History Department. During this period, the department transitioned to the online digital age from the offline paper age. Ultimately, as described by Elder Richard J. Maynes of the Seventy, who served as Executive Director from 2008 to 2012, the Church sought to remove the barriers that kept ordinary members of the Church from becoming deeply engaged in genealogy. “Mainly the barriers were the complexity of getting the job done and the costs associated and the time associated with that complexity. And so you’d pretty much eliminated the majority of the Church because of that. . . . The timing was interesting for me because it was the first time in the history of the Church that we were trying through technology to lower those barriers, to make it easier for ordinary members—and when I say ordinary members, I’m talking about members who are not technologists and who are not genealogists—to be able to succeed.”¹⁰

Family History Leadership

The leadership of the Family History Department from 1995 to 2011 provided key guidance in the transition to the digital age of family history research. The senior leadership included three levels: a policy-making executive level, a managing executive level, and a managing director level. The Temple and Family History Executive Council functioned as the department’s policy body. It consisted of two or more Apostles, a member of the Presiding Bishopric, and the Executive Directors of the Family History and Temple Departments. The Apostles who served during the period from 1995 to 2011 were:

- Elder Russell M. Nelson, chair, December 1990 to August 2007.
- Elder Neal A. Maxwell, December 1990 to May 2000.
- Elder Henry B. Eyring, May 2000 to August 2008, who replaced Elder Maxwell.
- Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin, February 2005 to December 2008, who served as a third Apostle on the council.
- Elder Dallin H. Oaks, August 2007 to February 2010, who replaced Elder Nelson as chair.
- Elder Richard G. Scott, beginning in August 2007, who replaced Elder Eyring and who became chair of the council in February 2010.
- Elder David A. Bednar, beginning in February 2010, who replaced Elder Oaks.¹¹

From January 1996 to 2011, Bishop Keith B. McMullin served as the Presiding Bishopric representative.¹²

Church leaders selected the Executive Director of the department from the Quorums of the Seventy, which operate under the direction of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. Those holding this position during the period from 1994 to 2011 were as follows:

- Elder Monte J. Brough, formerly a business owner, August 1993 to August 1998.

- Elder D. Todd Christofferson, formerly an attorney and now a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, August 1998 to August 2004.
- Elder Marlin K. Jensen, formerly an attorney, August 2004 to April 2008.
- Elder Richard J. Maynes, formerly a business executive, April 2008 to February 2012.



Monte J. Brough Courtesy
The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-Day Saints
(hereafter The Church)



D. Todd Christofferson
Courtesy The Church



Marlin K. Jensen Courtesy
The Church



Richard J. Maynes
Courtesy The Church

The Executive Director normally had two Assistant Executive Directors, drawn from the Quorums of the Seventy, who served one or more years. Sometimes, the Church appointed additional Assistant Executive Directors to assist in overseeing the department.¹³

In an unexpected development in April 2005, Church leaders appointed Elder Jensen as the Church Historian and Recorder. He served in this role while concurrently functioning as the Executive Director of the Family and Church History Department, which the Church had amalgamated in 2000. When Elder Maynes became the Executive Director of the Family History Department in April 2008, the Church separated the two departments and Elder Jensen only directed the Church History Department.¹⁴

Those called to the position of Executive Director are not selected because of family history expertise. Elder Christofferson commented on his experience: “I came to the department with admittedly limited experience and expertise. The assignment has been a blessing to me and has opened my eyes to the vital mission of redeeming the dead.”¹⁵ When Elder Jensen learned of his calling in early 2004 before his appointment in August, he was “flabbergasted” and figured he should log in for the first time to FamilySearch Internet as soon as possible.¹⁶

While technical expertise and genealogical background are not expected at this level of leadership, the Executive Director is a seasoned Church leader and, along with the guidance of higher Church councils, seeks divine guidance in making executive decisions. Commenting on their service, Jay Verkler said, “I’ve seen a set of people that are uniformly committed to the gospel and to the gospel moving forward, uniformly committed to understanding what the Lord would have them do in a situation, not hiding information or not manipulating information for specific goals or reasons but being very open and willing to have the same level of transparency.”¹⁷

Serving at the level below executive management is the managing director, who is a full-time employee. Those holding this position during the period 1995–2011 were:

- L. Reynolds Cahoon, November 1989 to February 1996.
- Wayne J. Metcalfe, acting managing director, February 1996 to May 1996.
- Richard E. Turley Jr., May 1996 to March 2008.
- Jay L. Verkler, associate managing director over family history, January 2002 to March 2008, and managing director, March 2008 to January 2012.¹⁸



L. Reynolds Cahoon Courtesy
Family History Department



Wayne J. Metcalfe
Courtesy The Church



Richard E. Turley Jr.
Courtesy The Church



Jay L. Verkler Courtesy
The Church

When L. Reynolds Cahoon left Church employment in 1996, he accepted a position at the National Archives, where he served as the assistant archivist and chief information officer, helping to develop the nation's policy for managing digital records. With the merger of the Church History and Family History Departments in 2000, Richard E. Turley Jr. served as the managing director, with two associate directors, one over family history and the other over Church history. Beginning with the appointment of Jay Verkler as associate managing director over family history, Turley devoted most of his time to writing *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* and delegated almost all of the family history decision making to Verkler. In March 2008, the Church appointed Turley as the assistant Church historian, and Jay Verkler took over his role as the managing director of the Family History Department.¹⁹

The department is responsible to the Quorum of Twelve Apostles and ultimately to the First Presidency of the Church. The Executive Director, with input from those reporting to him, must clarify some “very technical, very esoteric issues” for higher councils to ponder and decide.²⁰ For example, in 2001, department executive leadership met with the First Presidency to explain the idea of a lineage-linked central ordinance file accessed over the Internet.²¹ This concept evolved over time into FamilySearch.org, a “worldwide community platform” for genealogists to record and share records and images.²² We will present the details of these evolution in this history.

¹⁸Howard W. Hunter, “We Have a Work to Do,” *Ensign*, March 1995, 65.

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- ²See James B. Allen, Jessie L. Embry, Kahlile B. Mehr, "Hearts Turned to the Fathers: A History of the Genealogical Society of Utah, 1894–1994," *BYU Studies* 34, no. 2 (1995): 304–307.
- ³James B. Allen, Jessie L. Embry, Kahlile B. Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1995), 307–309 for TempleReady; 329–332 for FamilySearch.
- ⁴Richard E. Turley Jr., oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, January 20, 2009, 7; Stephen Kendall, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, October 12, 2007, author's notes.
- ⁵Executive Director's meeting minutes, August 30, 1994.
- ⁶Executive Director's meeting minutes, December 19, 1995.
- ⁷Executive Director's meeting minutes, September 14, 1999.
- ⁸Executive Director's meeting minutes, May 15, 2001.
- ⁹Executive Director's meeting minutes, August 21, 2001.
- ¹⁰Richard J. Maynes, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, April 11, 2012, 2.
- ¹¹"History of Executive Leadership: 1988–2007," June 21, 2007, internal FHD document; Sandra Mason, email, April 6, 2011; Jay Verkler comments, October 11, 2011.
- ¹²Sandra Mason, telephone conversation, October 14, 2011. She then served as the secretary to the committee.
- ¹³"History of Executive Leadership: 1988–2007," June 21, 2007, internal FHD document.
- ¹⁴"New Executive Director," April 29, 2008, internal FHD document.
- ¹⁵Ryan P. Christofferson, "Family History: A conversation with Elder D. Todd Christofferson," *The Religious Educator* 6, no. 2 (2005): 3.
- ¹⁶Marlin K. Jensen, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, January 26, 2009, 2.
- ¹⁷Jay L. Verkler, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, February 16, 2012, 18.
- ¹⁸"History of Executive Leadership: 1988–2007," June 21, 2007, internal FHD document. Through March 2008, Jay Verkler's official title was associate managing director.
- ¹⁹"Richard E. Turley Jr. Named Assistant Church Historian and Recorder," *Newsroom: The Official Resource for News Media, Opinion Leaders, and the Public* at <http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/news-releases-stories/richard-e-turley-jr-named-assistant-church-historian-and-recorder>, March 12, 2008.
- ²⁰Marlin K. Jensen, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, January 26, 2009, 9.
- ²¹Executive Director's meeting minutes, May 15, 2001.
- ²²Executive Director's meeting minutes, June 24, 2009.

Chapter 1: Create Order and Prepare Names

Creating order from the chaos of memory, both recorded and remembered, is an arduous task but one essential to genealogy or family history, the preferred term in the Church. Many in the genealogical community do it out of a heartfelt desire to know their ancestors, feel a connection with them, and know themselves better as well. Church members have an additional purpose—to prepare ancestral names with identifying information, such as birthplace and birth date, for vicarious ordinances in Church temples. This practice is based on the doctrine that proxy ordinances can benefit deceased ancestors and perpetuate family relationships in eternity. For the Church, this doctrine is the essential reason for genealogical systems and products. For all these genealogical and family history purposes, a key step in documenting lineages is an online system viewed by all and used by members to submit their ancestral names to the temple.

At the turn of the 20th century, the Church used Ancestral File and later the Pedigree Resource File (PRF) to document lineage information already compiled. Members used Personal Ancestral File (PAF) to compile information about their own ancestors and then TempleReady to submit ancestral names to temples. The temples used the Ordinance Recording System (ORS) to record ordinances and return data to the Family History Department. The department stored that data in a variety of files until it consolidated the data in the Ordinance Data Management System (ODM). This paper will discuss these legacy programs in more detail later on.

As the Church embarked at the end of the century on an unprecedented period of building temples worldwide, these computer systems were increasingly insufficient for the task. At the beginning of the new century, as technological developed rapidly, the department began building new systems that simplified the submission process. It also made ordinance data readily available so members could avoid duplicating ordinances for their ancestors. These new systems linked the records of living members with the records of their ancestors, creating a single database of lineage-linked names and associated temple ordinances. This database provided the material for the Family Ordinance Summary, a prototype system designed to simplify the submission of names for temple ordinances. Over the next eight years, the department engaged in a comprehensive effort to develop and deliver new FamilySearch. Concurrently, it adjusted name submission policy and made the database of completed ordinances comprehensive, with the recording of new ordinance added daily, something not done by previous systems. At the same time, the department struggled with providing the tools to minimize ordinance duplication and to address controversy concerning proxy temple ordinances.

Ultimately, the department took a great leap forward in creating new FamilySearch, which contained both lineage-linked genealogical data and temple ordinance data. The system simplified temple name submissions and permitted members to update genealogical information at the touch of a keyboard. It also provided a method for sharing the results of countless hours of research with others in the genealogical community, jump-starting the search process for the constant flow of neophytes entering the genealogical realm.

Temple Focus

A major expansion of temple building necessitated that the department enter the digital age to assist members in delivering and managing names for ordinance work. In a startling message in April 1998, President Gordon B. Hinckley announced the goal of having 100 temples in operation by the end of the century. At the time, the Church had fifty-one temples in operation and seventeen under construction, with two temples scheduled for completion in 1998. To have 100 temples in operation, the Church would have to complete an additional thirty temples in 1999 and 2000.¹ The greatest number of temples dedicated in any previous year had been six. Unprecedented then and unequalled since that time, the Church dedicated fifteen temples in 1999 and thirty-four temples in 2000, bringing the total number of operating temples to 102. It took another decade to augment the list with 32 additional temples, two fewer than the number of dedications in the single year of 2000. It is no wonder, then, that a poll of 900 randomly selected Church members ranked the proliferation of temples across the world as the second most important news story of the 20th century, second only to the revelation on the priesthood in 1978.²



President Gordon B. Hinckley at Nauvoo Temple Cornerstone Ceremony Courtesy The Church

The effort to “take the temples to the people,” as President Hinckley had declared six months before his startling announcement, rather than require extreme sacrifice for some members to get to the temples, represented a new experience for the Church.³ This effort also stretched the abilities of the Family History Department. With the increased emphasis on temple worship, the department had to create systems equal to the task of sustaining temple work around the earth.

After his announcement regarding the construction of new temples, President Hinckley clearly restated the primary purpose of family history work for members of the Church: “If temple ordinances are an essential part of the restored gospel, and I testify that they are, then we must provide the means by which they can be accomplished. All of our vast family history endeavor

is directed to temple work. There is no other purpose for it.”⁴ Using processes then in place, the department could not accommodate such a large growth in the number of temples.

Several years later, in 2001, Jay Verkler, the future managing director of the Family History Department, sat on a bench along the lawn east of the Salt Lake Temple, pondering the future of family history work in the Church and sketching a pattern for the work. “I was sitting there, and I had my notes and everything, and a person tapped me on the shoulder, and I looked up, and it was President Boyd K. Packer. He said, ‘What are you working on?’ . . . We talked a bit, and he . . . pointed to the temple, and he said, ‘Well, that’s the place that you need to face when you’re thinking about all the things you’re thinking about. You just stay focused on the temple.’”⁵ Though the experience was “out of the blue” and President Packer did not know Verkler, this experience presaged the temple focus that would be fundamental to the departmental decisions to provide genealogical resources and develop systems to keep pace with the increased participation in temple worship of Church members worldwide.

Following is a description and history of the legacy systems in place at the end of the 20th century. These included names systems—FamilySearch DOS and its successor, the Pedigree Resource File—names clearance programs—Personal Ancestral File and TempleReady—and ordinance systems—the Ordinance Recording System and Ordinance Data Management. To simplify procedures for finding and clearing names for the temples, programmers faced a daunting task to replace these programs with a single interactive system that provided ordinance information in real time.

FamilySearch DOS

Clearing names prior to the 21st century relied on FamilySearch DOS. In 1989, the department adopted the term FamilySearch to describe its databases published on compact disc and accessed by a DOS program delivered for use in the Family History Library. Beginning in 1991, the department delivered this resource to family history centers, selected over a hundred non-Church research institutions, and even homes.⁶ This distribution of the resource augured a new age of distributing genealogical information freely and widely, increasing dramatically the ease of access. FamilySearch DOS remained the primary means of distributing genealogical information until succeeded by FamilySearch Internet a decade later.



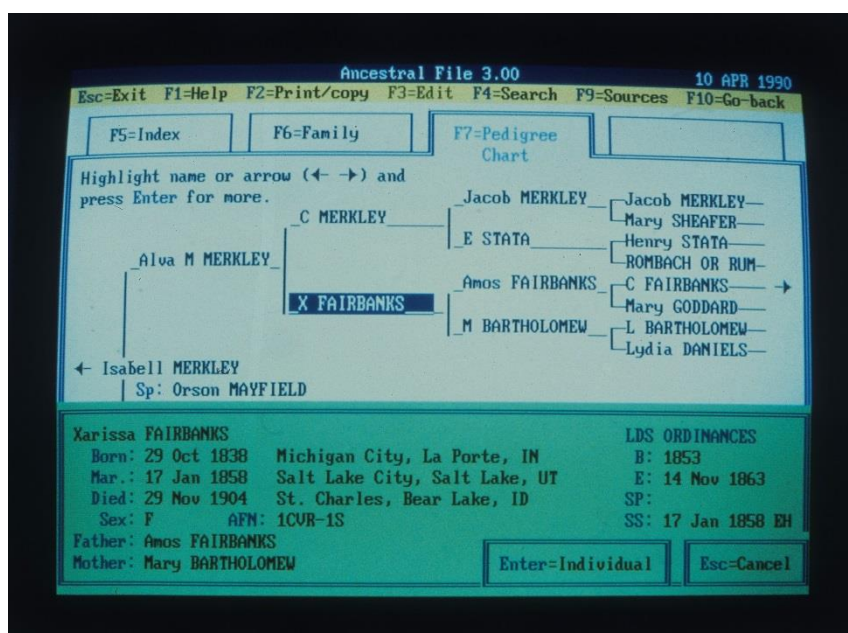
FamilySearch DOS and CDs Courtesy The Church

Public libraries, other research institutions, and individuals at home received FamilySearch DOS through GeneSys, a division of Dynix, a provider of automated library systems. GeneSys marketed, installed, and supported it.⁷ Though it operated in over a hundred libraries in 1994,

the distribution remained limited. The business relationship with Dynix ended in 1996, and the department assumed full responsibility for support and maintenance of the sites.⁸ FamilySearch DOS distribution to homes remained a test product from 1992 until 1998. The fee for home use was substantial—\$525 for all products and \$230 for Ancestral File alone.⁹ Eventually, the delivery of data over FamilySearch Internet rendered the DOS version obsolete and ended distribution of the product.

Department use of compact disc readers contributed to the development of this technology. Toshiba's anticipated that a compact disc would remain in a reader for a while before being swapped. A patron using Ancestral File or the IGI would swap discs continually and wear out a compact disc reader within a month. Toshiba sent people to Church headquarters to learn from the department how to improve the stability and lifespan of the readers because of frequent disc swapping.¹⁰

Ancestral File DOS



Ancestral File DOS Courtesy Family History Department

The key database of lineage-linked information on FamilySearch DOS was Ancestral File. For the last decade of the 20th century, the department considered it to be its flagship research product. It instituted the electronic delivery of lineage-linked names, enabled submitters to share their research conclusions worldwide, and gave users a beginning point for their own research.¹¹ But with the available technology, it took

a long time to update the information and publish a new compact disc release.¹² The department released seven file updates between 1989 and 1999, one every two years or less.¹³ The last had 36 million names.¹⁴

The file had weaknesses. Duplicates and bad merges confused many users. No timely method existed to correct information. Source citations and submitter names for electronic submissions were never published, and accessing the paper submissions required viewing them on microfilm. A correction in the file made at headquarters could be erased by a patron downloading the file when it was incorrect and resubmitting it with the original error. Still, seventy-nine percent of the records in the file had only one submitter and were likely free of these problems. Regardless of all the good content, the errors created a negative public perception of the file.¹⁵ The department froze the data in 1999 when it sold the Cyber 2000

computer on which the file ran.¹⁶ The department could no longer update the file without new programming. Another product called Pedigree Resource File (PRF) replaced it. Without any announcement, Ancestral File ended.

FamilySearch II

Hamstrung by lack of funding in the middle 1990s, the department struggled to keep up with technology. From 1996 to 1998, the department developed but never delivered FamilySearch II, intended to combine FamilySearch DOS, Personal Ancestral File, and TempleReady into an integrated package delivered to homes and family history centers as a Windows product distributed through compact disc.¹⁷ In the end, each product came out as a separate Windows programs.

Pedigree Resource File

The failure of Ancestral File to meet the expectations of the public prompted the department to temporarily replace it with a new means of receiving and distributing lineage-linked data. Given the financial constraints of the late 1990s, the department came up with a low-cost alternative to harness technology in serving the genealogical community. This alternative was known as the Pedigree Resource File (PRF). FamilySearch Internet product manager Ray Madsen conceived of and developed PRF. Released in 1999, PRF allowed anyone from the genealogical community to submit lineage-linked files electronically through FamilySearch Internet. The department published the information on compact disc and provided an online index for searching.

Consistent with the department policy at the time of contracting rather than building, it developed PRF in cooperation with Progeny, an outside firm. The department sent Progeny the data. Progeny indexed the data, published it on compact disc, and returned it for testing and distribution. This process all occurred rapidly, unlike the slow turnaround between submission and publication that had been the case with Ancestral File.¹⁸ Unlike the data for Ancestral File, the data for each submitter, PRF preserved as submitted and did not merged it.¹⁹ In 2003, the department requested that submissions be made to PRF only, thereby replacing Ancestral File as the department's primary resource for delivering lineage-linked information.²⁰

Many people in the Church and also in the more general genealogical community submitted to the new file. PRF grew from 8 million to 150 million names in eight years.²¹ In 2006, DVDs replaced compact discs as the delivery medium because of a five-fold advantage in storage capacity per disc.²² In 2009, the file consisted of 145 discs (combined CD and DVD), with an index of over 200 million names. PRF had a significant downside. A person could correct some records and then resubmit the whole file, creating significant duplication because the names were never merged. The department resolved this flaw to some degree when it loaded the data into new FamilySearch and merged much of it. Another problem with PRF was that searchers had to buy discs containing the data found in their search. PRF did not provide immediate retrieval of data, as new FamilySearch later did, nor did it permit editing and encourage

collaboration; however, it did provide electronic access to the research work of thousands of contributors.²³

Personal Ancestral File

For nearly 20 years, the initial step for most Church members began the name submission process by entering their ancestral information into Personal Ancestral File (PAF). This program permitted users to digitize their lineage information, increasing their ability to add to, correct, and share it. The department released PAF 2.31 in 1994, on the 10th anniversary of the product's inception.²⁴ It continued to deliver newer versions through 2001. Personal Ancestral File 3.0, a DOS product, came out in August 1997.²⁵ The program lacked the ability to make use of many printer functions, something easily done in a Windows operating environment. To shore up this deficit, the department decided to buy rather than build this functionality. It obtained Personal Ancestral File Companion from Progeny, an outside vendor, and released it in December 1997. This software printed quality genealogy charts and reports through the Windows operating system.²⁶

In September 1999, the department released PAF 4.0, the first Windows version.²⁷ Previous to this release, the department distributed PAF through Church distribution centers or the Family History Library.²⁸ In contrast, PAF 4.0 could be downloaded for free from FamilySearch Internet, newly deployed to provide online access to department products and services. By the end of the year, 300,000 copies had been downloaded from the Internet site.²⁹ In just a few months, as many PAF copies went out as during its first decade, 1984–1994. In what later developed as a significant trend with all department product releases, translation became part of the development process.³⁰ The department distributed PAF 4.0 not only in English but also in Spanish, Portuguese, German, and French. The number of copies distributed rose the second year to 406,000.³¹ The release of PAF 5.0 permitted data entry in Cyrillic and Asian scripts. It also broadened the number of language interfaces to include Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Swedish.³² In another measure to benefit the international community, it modified the Family Group Record form to have only one name field for cultures that do not use surnames. For Church members, it added the ability to prequalify temple name submissions prior to using TempleReady.³³

Others contributed to making PAF popular and useful. Without any prodding from headquarters, PAF user groups emerged throughout the United States to provide local assistance and were active for many years.³⁴ While PAF continued to be used as of 2011, the department no longer developed it after 2001. The department left this market space entirely to third-party vendors and offered them an application programming interface to synchronize their products with new FamilySearch. Taking up the cause of PAF users, two commercial vendors, FamilyInsight and Ancestral Quest released the first synchronization products in 2008 for the interaction of PAF with new FamilySearch.³⁵

Emphasis on using PAF diminished over time as the department encouraged direct data entry into new FamilySearch as a single source of information on Church ancestry and temple ordinances. Instead of having files on thousands of individual computers, the department

envisioned a single place online for storing and sharing this information. As those who submitted data passed on to join the ranks of their ancestors, the data they collected would remain to benefit the living wherever they resided.

TempleReady

From 1995 to 2007, Church members used PAF in conjunction with TempleReady (released to English-speaking stakes in November 1993) to submit names.³⁶ The Church delay the release to all stakes, including those outside the United States, until the summer of 1995 because there were insufficient numbers of computers to run the program in family history centers and local units.³⁷ However, all temples had the program to serve patrons who arrived with data not yet cleared through TempleReady. To serve the Church's non-English-speaking audience from 1993 to 1999, the department translated into 31 languages *A Member's Guide to Temple and Family History Work*, which contained the policies for using TempleReady.³⁸



TempleReady DOS Courtesy Family History Department

TempleReady compared patron information with ordinance information in the International Genealogical Index (IGI) the department's file of completed proxy temple ordinances, available on compact discs. The department supplied these discs with the TempleReady program. As the size of the IGI grew, the number of discs increased. The growing database necessitated frequent disc swapping, increasing the amount of time necessary to retrieve information. Compression technology implemented in the summer of 1993 permitted the number of discs in the IGI to be halved for the same storage space, reducing expense and decreasing the need for users to swap discs when accessing the data.³⁹

Initially, PAF did not work directly with TempleReady. Users had to export their data from PAF using a GEDCOM file (a data communications format), and then they had to import the file into TempleReady. Or they could enter the information directly into TempleReady. The department wrote TempleReady for the DOS operating system and upgraded it regularly for nine years. It released the final DOS version in July 2001, along with a new IGI addendum described later in this chapter.⁴⁰

In February 2001, the department released a version of TempleReady written for the Windows operating system. Kent Olsen was the lead engineer of the team that developed this version of TempleReady.⁴¹ It allowed users to use TempleReady data directly in a PAF database. The elimination of interim steps permitted users to download ordinance data into a PAF file and edit the PAF data.⁴² In addition, the Windows version reduced the number of steps for submitting names, thereby simplifying the process.⁴³ It served as an early step toward resolving

a long-time problem Richard E. Turley experienced as a new managing director of the department. When describing to temple presidents the steps to prepare a name in TempleReady DOS for ordinances, he saw their “eyes glaze and their heads nod.” He realized that if they had difficulty, surely the average member would as well.⁴⁴



TempleReady Windows Courtesy Family History Department

The conversion to the Windows operating environment opened up the possibility of Church members using TempleReady in their homes to clear names in conjunction with the newly deployed Ordinance Index on FamilySearch Internet site, which provided a single online source to determine what ordinances had been performed. Department leadership had discussed this option extensively in 2000.⁴⁵ While the department initiated a project in 2001 to enable this possibility, it judged the result unreliable and too difficult to use without assistance. As a

result, the department absorbed these developmental resources into new FamilySearch, delaying the possibility of home name submission.⁴⁶

TempleReady simplified and decentralized the name-submission process, but it amplified data quality problems, such as duplicate and inappropriate submissions. The department had controlled these problems previously by clearing names at headquarters for temple ordinances. With TempleReady, the department did not know what names had been submitted until the data came from the temples after the ordinances were completed. The Church chose at that time to ensure that TempleReady only be distributed to Church members in good standing and to encourage priesthood leaders to supervise the name-submission process.⁴⁷ With the release of new FamilySearch, the department once again oversaw the process of name submission, a better long-term solution.

Ordinance Recording System

After Church members submitted names and performed ordinances, the department maintained a file of ordinance completion dates. Beginning in 1990, the department used Ordinance Recording System (ORS) to perform this function.⁴⁸ The department filed ordinances in three categories: (1) members serving as proxies using names they submitted, (2) members serving as proxies using a name submitted by other members by extraction or indexing, and (3) members receiving the ordinances in person. It called these three categories respectively the family file, temple file, and living file.

The ORS evolved over time. Initially, when the system received names from a family group record in TempleReady, it did not preserve the family relationships identified in TempleReady.

Consequently, an ordinance recorded for a person named *Elizabeth* who had no family name would retain no connections to other family members.⁴⁹ Also, ORS returned information for a name to headquarters only upon the completion of all ordinances. Both problems were resolved for family file names beginning in 1996, when temples implemented the Family Names System (FNS) component of ORS.⁵⁰ A temple personal identification number (TPIN) was assigned to each name. This number linked all ordinance information to the correct name in the central file.⁵¹ Thereafter, names included information about relationships, and ordinance data no longer sat unreported at the temple.

The ability of the system to use the TPIN to track ordinances for individuals dramatically impacted family file procedures. Previously, the temple maintained large files of family file cards, waiting for members to complete all ordinances associated with each card. Since ordinance status could now be tracked in the system, Church members could take care of their own family file cards. If a member lost a card, a new card that contained information on ordinances previously performed could be printed. Rows of card filing cabinets in the temples were no longer necessary, and members could perform ordinances for a single person in multiple temples or send cards to relatives to perform ordinances in a temple close to them.⁵²



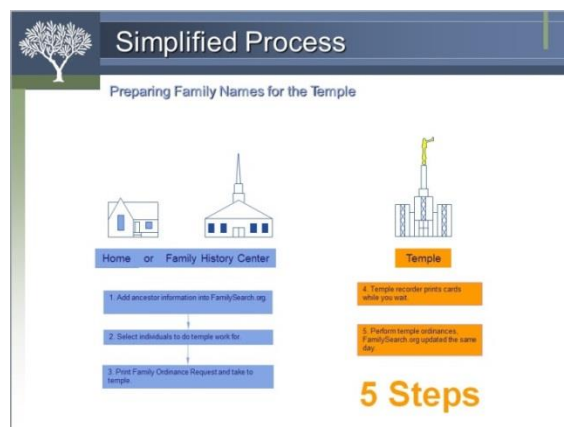
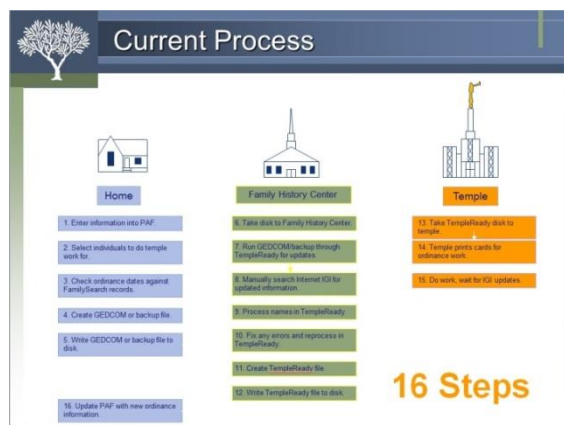
Ordinance Cards with Bar Codes
Courtesy The Church

The FNS also began printing barcodes on family file cards. Recording the completion of an ordinance simply required a scan of the card. Previously, a worker recorded an ordinance by typing an identification number from the card into the system. In time, a visual cue was added by printing colored family file cards. White cardstock gave way to pink cards for performing ordinances for females, blue cards for males, and ivory cards for the sealing of couples.⁵³

The department eventually upgraded the system for processing names in the temple file and living file. In 1998, the Temple Names System (TNS) produced multiple-name lists for individuals and couples, allowing an entire sheet of names to be recorded with the scanning of a single bar code. Toward the end of 1999, the Living Names System (LNS) allowed living ordinances to be processed through ORS, which previously had been done manually. System accuracy improved because the Membership Department sent records of members on a compact disc to the temples, permitting a staff worker to align the information given by patrons with their official membership records from headquarters.⁵⁴

The upgraded Ordinance Recording System enabled the Temple Department to efficiently handle names in the family, temple, and living files. But the exchanges of information between Church members and the Temple, Family History, and Membership Departments still required manual procedures, with files being sent back and forth for batch processing and computer diskettes being mailed or carried from place to place. This process occasionally created unreliable and erroneous data.

Beginning in 2007, the department harnessed technology to integrate all these steps and processes into a single system that recorded and communicated information immediately. The department released ORS as an integrated component of new FamilySearch. On the front end, the system sent names to the temples, freeing patrons from toting diskettes to the temple. The system stored all genealogical data in new FamilySearch, leaving ORS to handle front-end recording in the temples. Upon the completion of an ordinance in the temple, ORS immediately reported the data to new FamilySearch, replacing the previous batch system of shipping ordinance data daily or weekly.



Comparison of Previous and New Processes
Courtesy Jim Greene

Members performing proxy ordinances reserved ordinances from anywhere they had access to a computer and the Internet. They then printed an eye-readable Family Ordinance Request, which they took to the temple. Temple staff used the Family Ordinance Request to print ordinance cards. Upon the completion of an ordinance, the temple scanned the card and patrons kept the ordinance card for their records.⁵⁵ Only a few steps were required to get a name from discovery to ordinance completion, and the whole process could be completed in a single day, a vast difference from the months required by procedures used during the 20th century.⁵⁶ In addition, automatic data quality measures were built in to ensure accuracy and protect against data loss.⁵⁷

Along with recording ordinances for the deceased, ORS allowed data about ordinances for the living to flow seamlessly from temples to Church headquarters. New FamilySearch connected the Membership and Temple Departments, giving both departments immediate access to membership data. To provide for the privacy of

members, the information on living individuals was not made publicly available in new FamilySearch. This information remained private until a Church member was deceased or presumed to be deceased, usually 110 years after the date of birth.⁵⁸

Ordinance Data

The department had long desired that Church members worldwide have access to a single complete and current file of ordinance data for lineage-linked individuals as a guard against duplicating ordinance work. Achieving this goal evaded the department until the release of new FamilySearch to the whole Church in late 2009. Until that release, Church members simply

did not have a complete or current file to check before submitting names to the temples. In 1994, members searched for proxy ordinance information on 33 compact discs known as the International Genealogical Index (IGI).⁵⁹ The IGI edition published the year previously had over 200 million names, including 24.5 million names extracted from original temple records through the Family Records Extraction Program (FREP).⁶⁰ With the addition of these 24.5 million names, patrons no longer needed to search manually the Temple Index Bureau microfilms, which had been the only index to pre-1970 ordinances.⁶¹ Still, as an offline product the IGI was outdated the day after publication. While remarkable to deliver this much information to such a broad audience at the time, it was not sufficient to achieve the goal of providing complete and current ordinance data.

The massive size of the file dictated a decision that affected data in post-1993 editions of the IGI. In early 1995, the department published new names in an addendum of six discs rather than remastering the compact discs for the whole index.⁶² As long as the index was produced on compact disc, it added names only to the addendum. While this procedure presented a hindrance to searchers who had to look in two places instead of just one, it was the only financially viable solution, given the cost of reprocessing older names to master a single index.

Unseen by the public but essential to managing the data, in 1996 the department collocated ordinance data into a single database known as Ordinance Data Management (ODM). This system brought together ordinance records from various databases and recorded in a variety of different ways; it included pre-1970 temple records (created by FREP), GIANT (information on ordinances that took place from 1969 to 1991), the Family Entry System (used from 1970 to 1990 to clear names on the basis of family relationships), and the Completed Ordinance File (generated by TempleReady, with information about ordinances that took place from 1991 to 1997).⁶³ The new database provided a single source from which to derive the 1997 and later releases of the IGI and the Ordinance Index (described below).⁶⁴ The department expanded the scope of ODM over time to include data from newer systems, such as the Family Names System of ORS, and to send extracted names to the temples and receive data on completed ordinances from the temples.⁶⁵ The department used ODM to manage ordinance data for 13 years until it migrated that data into new FamilySearch.

ODM did not store information in non-Roman alphabets. In 1999, the department created Ordinance Data Management International (ODMI) to manage data recorded in other alphabets. TempleReady and ORS handled the front-end processing of Asian scripts in the Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Seoul temples and Cyrillic script in the Stockholm, Freiberg, and Frankfurt temples. The local ODMI servers stored the names. After the ordinances were performed, the department transmitted the data to Church headquarters to be processed by the ORS system. After processing the data, the ORS system returned the information to the various ODMI servers, updating the files there. New FamilySearch could process data in non-Roman alphabets, so once released; the department shipped the ODMI servers to Salt Lake City, and integrated the data into that system. The departments completed this process in 2010.⁶⁶

Prior to ODM, the department delivered temple ordinance data through the IGI on CDs. In 2002, the department added the Ordinance Index to FamilySearch Internet, available only to Church members.⁶⁷ The online release of this information came closer to the longer-term objective of providing a complete and current ordinance file by permitting the data online to be updated upon receipt from the temples. The system protected the privacy of the ordinance data by granting access only to Church members registered on the site.⁶⁸ The main functionality not available for the information online was automated duplication checking through TempleReady.⁶⁹ Members could still use the compact discs through FamilySearch DOS to do an initial check of whether ordinances had been performed, and then they could do a manual online search of the more current data. Commercial vendors of personal genealogical data management programs came to the aid of members by compiling results from multiple searches on FamilySearch Internet into a single view for program users.

The department understood this deficiency but determined to put resources into new FamilySearch as a long-term answer to delivering current ordinance data. With the complete rollout of new FamilySearch in late 2009, TempleReady and the IGI became obsolete. ODM continued to function as a means to update ODM data in new FamilySearch, but no new ordinances were added to it.⁷⁰ New FamilySearch stored all ordinances submitted and completed through that system, adding to the data imported from previous systems, as described above. With new FamilySearch, the department finally achieved the long-desired comprehensive and current database of ordinances performed in latter-day temples.

While delivering ordinance data to Church members was desirable, the inability to do exclusively generated another challenge: the negative reactions of people from the general public who had access to ordinance data and objected to proxy ordinances being performed for their ancestors. When the Family History Department decided in the 1970s to use ordinance indexes as a publicly available research tool, the department felt that the general public would not pay attention to the ordinance data appended to the genealogical data, and caught by surprise when it did.

The first inklings of a public problem emerged in the early 1990s when various groups objected to ordinances being performed for deceased members of their religious or ethnic group. In response to this problem, the department in 1997 separated the ordinance data from the genealogical data, which had been previously connected in the IGI, creating the Ordinance Index. This restricted ordinance data access to Church members through TempleReady or through the LDS Options of FamilySearch DOS. Without the ordinance data, the IGI continued to provide index access to genealogical data.⁷¹ The department expected researchers to use the automated data, and phased out staff searches of ordinances information on paper, film, or microfiche.⁷² From 1994 to 2009, the department struggled with the dual challenge of delivering current ordinance data to Church members while keeping it confidential because of its sacred and private nature. New FamilySearch provided the means to do both.

The transition to New FamilySearch introduced a new definition of the official temple record. A record of temple ordinances is mandated in Doctrine and Covenants 128:1–9. The medium for

this record shifted from paper to microfilm in 1942. Later, the department designated a microfilm listing of ordinances generated by its computer systems to serve as the official record. By 2000, the systems that created the microfilm output needed to be replaced, microfilm costs had soared, and the use of microfilm media had decreased. Clearly, without a comprehensive index, a microfilm record had little value beyond simple preservation. New FamilySearch resolved all these issues. The Family History Department, the Temple Department, and the presiding Church councils concurred to designate new FamilySearch as the official temple record, moving what the Church considered the best and final record of temple ordinances to a computer system. Still, backup and preservation copies of the official record were created and updated regularly on both digital media and microfilm.

Family Ordinance Summary

In 1994, the Church initiated a pioneering effort to create a single lineage-linked file of Church members both living and deceased, along with their ancestors for whom proxy work had been done. It also began a coordinated effort to manage computer technology development at Church headquarters.⁷³ The impact would not be felt in department systems for some years, but the effort was conceptually important when those systems were finally created. A high-level Information Communications Committee (ICC) envisioned a single Church wide system to store genealogical and ordinance data.⁷⁴ An interdepartmental committee conceived of merging data from the Temple, Family History, and Membership Departments to accomplish this purpose.⁷⁵ This vision culminated 15 years later with the release of new FamilySearch.

In the meantime, the department pursued this objective but could not find the technology to accomplish it. The interdepartmental committee met sporadically. Consequently, the project evolved slowly until 2000, when it received funding.⁷⁶ The department established the Membership and Ordinance Record System Committee (MORS) to develop the system.⁷⁷ When fielded, the test procedure for the system consisted of the department printing a four-generation pedigree chart and ordinance cards for all members of a Church unit. The paper output permitted all Church members in the targeted units, many of whom did not have computers in their homes, to be a part of the test. The data on the chart and cards came from combining Church membership records with ordinance data in the Ordinance Index and relationship data from Ancestral File. The department invited Church members in the test group to fill in missing information on the charts and cards with information from memory or from records in their possession. The members then took the card to the temple. A temple worker entered the additional data into the computer, printed a barcode on the card, and then scanned it when the ordinance was done. The department called the prototype Family Ordinance Summary (FOS), after the name of the pedigree charts.⁷⁸

The FOS process occurred in homes, did not require members to do any research, and was done entirely on paper, potentially comforting to those not yet using computers, an important consideration at the time. All these benefits made the process attractive to first-generation members and others who had never submitted names to the temple.⁷⁹ The department pilot-tested the process in the Oklahoma City, Albuquerque, and Fresno temple districts in 2001 and then in the Santo Domingo temple district, in the Dominican Republic, in 2002.⁸⁰ In 2001,

members in the Oklahoma City and Albuquerque temple districts submitted 10,000 ordinances and completed 5,600.⁸¹ FOS instructions invited ward councils to assist less-active or new members in using the forms and then to distribute the remaining forms to the more well-established members.⁸² Distributing the forms gave bishops an opportunity to enter homes that may have been previously closed to Church leadership. It involved those not previously engaged in family history, activated some members, and even led to baptisms. According to the lead programmer, Scott Olsen, “The magic was seeing the information [that was] already available in Church files.”⁸³

In 2003, new FamilySearch absorbed the functions of FOS.⁸⁴ Despite the advancements pioneered by FOS, it required headquarters processing support, which would not scale easily to being used in thousands of Church units. New FamilySearch amplified the strengths of seeing linkages from the living to the deceased and the ease of submitting names, it encouraged members to submit names in addition to the first four generations, and it provided many additional features as well.

The Unified System

In 2002, the department faced a decision with far-reaching implications for the department and family history. It considered building, rather than contracting as it had done for FamilySearch Internet, a single, integrated online system. Such a system would make records available to members regardless of their genealogy or technology skills, their language, or their culture and assist them to discover and submit the names of ancestors for temple work.⁸⁵

The experience with contracting the system for FamilySearch Internet in 1999 (discussed later) helped the department to learn the pros and cons of outsourced software. Department engineers found that the software had a lot of “holes that needed to be fixed,” and they spent much time repairing the system.⁸⁶ By 2001, not a single person in the department knew the code for the website, making it virtually impossible to enhance the system or fix problems.⁸⁷ When it came to developing a new system at the beginning of the new century, the Church chose to build one rather than contract a consulting firm to build it. It chose to develop the expertise to build systems in-house and set the goal in 2002 to have the system finished by 2004.⁸⁸ This goal was optimistic, given that the department had never accomplished such an extensive task in so short a time and lacked the technology and the personnel with desirable skills to create the new system.

Throughout 2001, the department developed the vision of a single integrated and interactive system of lineage-linked names, ordinance data, and research sources. The new undertaking began with an effort to fulfill a new department plan authored by Elder D. Todd Christofferson in February 2001. The plan had six points: (1) acquire and preserve the records most useful to members, (2) organize and distribute the records for ready access, (3) facilitate access to records held by others, (4) offer simple instructions online and on paper to members for using the records, (5) help members submit ancestors’ names for temple ordinances, (6) and compile the “book . . . worthy of all acceptance,” as described in the scriptures.⁸⁹ Under the direction of

managing director Richard (Rick) E. Turley Jr., selected staff began developing concrete initiatives to fulfill the plan.

Turley selected Jay Verkler to lead the effort. In early 2001, Verkler, a veteran of the computer industry sporting the clothes and beard that bespoke the Silicon Valley, had been meeting with others in the Church Office Building to suggest improvements to the Church's local unit websites. While there, he stopped to visit with Elder Henry B. Eyring, a personal acquaintance. Elder Eyring said, "You think you are here to discuss websites. It became clear to me this morning in the temple that you are here for a different purpose." Elder Eyring explained the problems with ordinance duplication and the effort to improve order in the genealogical records of the Church. After Verkler agreed to assist, Elder Eyring directed him to go to Rick Turley's office.⁹⁰ Impressed by the spirit he felt in that meeting, Rick relates, "I did something which was very unusual for me. In fact, I've never done it before and never done it since. I said to Jay, 'I would like you be a volunteer consultant to work with us.'"⁹¹ Verkler had just sold a software enterprise and was available for a new challenge. He accepted.⁹² While commuting every week from his home in Portola Valley, California, Verkler immersed himself in rethinking the department objectives and procedures that had been initiated at the beginning of the new millennium.

As a consultant, Verkler reported to department leadership that the systems then in place were quickly becoming obsolete and that staff were not keeping up-to-date with the technology.⁹³ He helped create the Core Docs, a set of technical concept documents delivered in May 2001, which mapped out a future system. The Core Docs provided an overall blueprint for managing, preserving, and delivering records and research to users. They outlined how to bring order to the disparate department databases and how to allow collaborative sharing and editing of new content. The Core Docs served as a lodestar for the initial development of the new system.⁹⁴ Verkler performed various consulting assignments in all areas of the department until October 2001, when department leaders invited him to become associate managing director effective January 2002. He accepted the position and shaved his beard on Thanksgiving Day.⁹⁵

In October 2001, Turley directed his staff to use a business model based on a book published in 1996 called the *Balanced Scorecard*, a popular means at the beginning of the century to develop a strategy and then mobilize executives and employees to implement it.⁹⁶ About 100 staff became involved. As a result of the process, department staff completed a strategy map in April 2002 that detailed how the department could encourage genealogical research and temple work for the deceased, broaden member participation, prepare the foundation for a book of human lineage, be priesthood directed, and maximize the return on resources. A chart of the strategy was comprehensive but complicated, with multiple arrows connecting various objectives and results. Department leadership simplified the chart to highlight two primary purposes: 1) organize, link, and redeem families and 2) find ancestors through records. These purposes became the driving strategy throughout the rest of the decade.

In January 2002, Verkler began his new role as associate managing director. Before his appointment, the development process was regimented, with the Information and

Communication Systems (ICS) Department controlling the hardware and development tools. He dissolved that developmental structure, exercised a free hand to greatly improve the development process, and obtained funding more readily than previously. He employed the methodology of delivering and improving. Consequently, rather than having a product forever in development and never getting released, the department released incremental versions regularly so the product could be used even though imperfect.⁹⁷ Commenting on Verkler's role, Russell Stay, a department director, said, "He can grasp and juggle more details and more data about a broader swath of information than anyone I've ever met in my life. To further complement his talents, [they are] not limited just technically; he has a good business mind, too. There are very few people that have that kind of breadth and depth."⁹⁸

At the beginning of 2002, Verkler and his staff eliminated all but 15 of the department's 57 technology projects then in development. Generally, they axed any project not vital to creating an integrated system of lineage-linked data and ordinances.⁹⁹ They focused resources on creating an entirely new product minted internally as the Unified System.¹⁰⁰ A system of such scope and magnitude could not be undertaken without the approval of presiding leadership: the Executive Directors of the department (members of the Quorums of the Seventy); the Temple and Family History Executive Council (members of the Quorum of the Twelve); high level committees, such as the Information and Communications, Budget and Appropriations, and Human Resources committees; the presiding Church quorums (Presidents of the Seventy, Quorum of the Twelve, and First Presidency); and finally the Council of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve.

In October 2002, after months of briefing various councils and committees, Verkler was unsure how to get all these bodies to agree and despaired that the required approvals would ever be given. He prayed and in answer felt this spiritual impression: "I've got this one. You can stop worrying about . . . solving the problem. I'll handle it."¹⁰¹ The next day Elder Henry B. Eyring reported to him that President Hinckley had reviewed all dimensions of the problem with other Church leaders that morning, and they had decided to proceed.¹⁰² With that approval, the department created and launched implementation teams.¹⁰³ Over the next several months, countless meetings and discussions took place to develop the vision and create a concrete plan to provide digital information to Church members in a way that would be easy for them to use and understand.¹⁰⁴

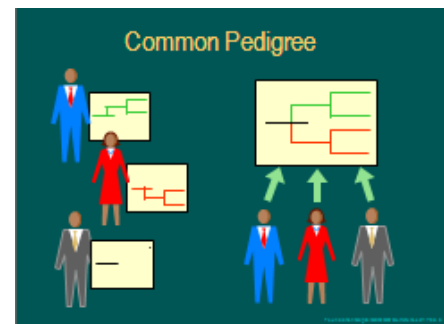
With the primary purpose of redeeming families, it included these objectives: to enable spirits to accept the gospel and receive vicarious ordinances (referring to temple work), increase Church member participation in all aspects of the work, and provide for an orderly recording of lineage and ordinance data.¹⁰⁵ Daniel Rapp, hired in November 2002, was impressed at the scope of the work ahead. From a technical perspective, it rivaled anything he had ever been involved with or aware of in the industry.¹⁰⁶ In comparing the project to one with a slightly larger code base at Novell where he had worked, Gary Stokes commented about the Unified System, "The data that's in it is much more complex, much larger and more complex than the data that we worked on [at Novell]."¹⁰⁷ Brad Christensen, who had worked for the Federal Reserve, Chase Manhattan, American Airlines, and other large customers, pronounced the Unified System the

most difficult project he had ever undertaken because “there were literally 50 different places where things were stored, and [they were] stored in different ways” that needed to be merged into a single system.¹⁰⁸ Elder D. Todd Christofferson, the Executive Director, was particularly concerned with “creating order in our records” and provided impetus to move the department in that direction.¹⁰⁹

At the end of 2002, the staff began poring over the planning documents, saying, “How really are we going to do this?” The Core Docs identified what to do but not how to do it. They did not provide a clear architecture but only a conceptual framework of how to achieve it. A herculean undertaking, the staff looked for a way to divide it into workable chunks.¹¹⁰

Common Pedigree

In 2003, system developers divided the Unified System into two halves or phases. The first half or phase would assist members to organize their family history information and submit names to the temple. The second half or phase would assist members to find names from earlier generations in digitized records and indexes. They expected to deliver both halves by means of the Internet.¹¹¹ Internally, they commonly referred to internally as the Common Pedigree, and the second half as the Research Subsystem. Even though they developed the two parts separately, they always sought to develop each in the context of the other and to integrate them into one system that ultimately assisted all Church members to discover and compile their family histories.¹¹² The Research Subsystem is discussed in the next chapter and the Common Pedigree in this one.



Common Pedigree Visualization
Courtesy Family History Department

They designed the Common Pedigree to contain certified temple records and genealogical information.¹¹³ The certified temple ordinance records could not be changed because they were records of temple events, mandated by scripture and considered sacred. The genealogical information, contributed by users, could be changed. The temple data would be static (but would continually be added to), and the genealogical information would be dynamic. While the system would permit linking between the two record types, it would not merge them.

The department desired to have system users, regardless of genealogical skill, contribute their family information to the Common Pedigree. When Church members found new information through digitized documents and indexes in the Research Subsystem, they would compile this new information and enter it into the Common Pedigree. The department also planned to have the Common Pedigree, initially released under the temporary banner of new FamilySearch, be named Family Tree when released as part of FamilySearch.org. The department sought to make it an integration point in the genealogical world for collecting and displaying lineage-linked family information.¹¹⁴

In October 2003, serious work began on the Common Pedigree, with a big powwow that lasted for several weeks to tackle unresolved issues, determine what to build, and reduce the scope enough that the system could be built in months rather than years. Department leadership decided to create test releases before going public, beginning with the 0.8 release. This allowed the department to uncover failures sooner rather than later so appropriate modifications could be made. In addition, the test releases would provide a sufficiently tangible system for measuring and verifying incremental progress.

Verkler had a strong feeling that, serious problems or not, the department must release a system to plant a flag on a hilltop, metaphorically speaking, to indicate progress and test the system as the department developed or refined it. Every month, the engineers and product managers had a visibility meeting. They were developing interesting and important components, but Verkler could not yet see a unified system coming out of it. He began to worry even though the engineers assured him that they thought everything would come together on schedule. With the first release of 0.8 in the first quarter of 2004, it became clear that the department was failing. Engineers were tackling the simple problems that could be implemented quickly rather than some of the complex but essential ones. This approach would surely delay the system in the long run. It seemed that the system was not coming together as a whole.¹¹⁵

By late summer of 2004, the product was a mere shadow of what had been anticipated when launched in 2002. The department designated the summer release a dress rehearsal for future releases of the system; and it only tested the basic building blocks. Church members in 28 stakes participated.¹¹⁶ Several significant problems emerged from the 0.8 release: 1) the system architecture could not scale to accommodate hundreds of thousands of users; 2) the system was not redundant, meaning that if one part went down, the whole system failed; 3) the underlying data model of a nuclear family did not accommodate changes caused by divorce, adoption, remarriage, plural marriage, and other types of familial relationships.¹¹⁷ In essence, the department had not built "the right foundation, the right architecture, [and] the right code to get the job done."¹¹⁸ The health of the engineering leader, Mike Bowen, plummeted until he was incapacitated.

In August 2004, the Church appointed Elder Marlin K. Jensen as the new Executive Director in place of Elder D. Todd Christofferson. Verkler's report to the new Executive Director was stark: the engineering leader was incapacitated, and there was no replacement; 0.8 was seriously broken, and a whole new system was being designed. With Elder Jensen's support, Verkler took on an additional role as engineering leader, while still running the department as the associate managing director.¹¹⁹ Elder Jensen likewise immersed himself in the effort, patiently wading through the daunting challenges and stresses of moving the system forward.¹²⁰

In his new role, Verkler encouraged the engineers to begin thinking of the whole system, with its many machines and components, a broader perspective than the limited scope of earlier development efforts. Work began on the 0.9 release. Like 0.8, the department intended this release to be for Church member audience only. It delayed indefinitely the 1.0 release for the general public. Release 0.9 required an extensive redesign of major functions of the system as

well as the underlying data model. They set a goal to deliver 0.9 alpha by July 1, 2005. To accomplish this task, the engineers “started a death march,” working later and later as the deadline approached. They encountered a major problem with the system development tools being “brittle.” If an engineer entered the wrong code, it could take down the whole system, delaying everyone else’s work.¹²¹

With the new focus on overall system development and to recognize problems early, in December 2004, the development team ran a test release of the system on 27 computers together. Previous attempts had been in the range of five computers. The staff knew that the system had to scale to at least 1,400 computers before the department could release it publicly — 700 in Ashburn, Virginia, and 700 in West Jordan, Utah, the two sites chosen to host a primary and a back-up system.¹²²



Jay Verkler and 0.9 Development Managers on Day of Release Courtesy Brian Jensen

Developers realized how quickly searching for and retrieving all information pertaining to an individual in the system was critical to the usefulness of the new system. Working on release 0.9, Daniel Rapp and his team despaired at the seeming impossibility of reaching 10,000 record comparisons per second on a single computer, especially when the current rate stood at one comparison every two seconds. To Rapp, it seemed that an engineer would be happy for a two-fold increase and ecstatic to get a 10-fold increase; it would be a rare thing to get a 100-fold increase. Engineers had worked for two years to achieve the

current rate. The team fasted and prayed over the weekend. When they reconvened on Monday, each member of the team had received insight on a specific area of the problem. Following the new direction with a united effort, they achieved by Friday of that week a rate of 18,000 to 20,000 comparisons per second on a single computer.¹²³ The whole incident, referred to as “Black Friday” referring to the Friday before the breakthroughs, was a step into the dark that led the group to achieve unparalleled results. It also served as a precursor to many such experiences that followed.¹²⁴

The department released 0.9 alpha six weeks late, in late August 2005; but it constituted the first time the department delivered a system that had real data and worked on a large scale, in this case nearly 200 machines. Users were pleased with the ease of submitting names, the main purpose of the system. However, the search and merge functions needed to be improved because of the massive, complicated data set. Those acquainted with PAF wished it to work more like the product they were used to, but the intended audience was people with little or no genealogical experience.¹²⁵

The department had little to say publicly, but it kept its employees informed about what to expect, even though many of them had little to do with system development. In an internal memo in August 2005, it described the strengths of the new system. These strengths included reducing duplication of research by displaying all family history databases in a single pedigree format, reducing duplication of temple ordinances by allowing a person to reserve names, and simplifying the submission process by reducing the steps required for submission from 16 steps to 5: log on, select an ancestor, select ordinances, print an ordinance request form, and take the form to the temple.¹²⁶ Following the philosophy of incremental releases, 0.9 alpha was followed by 0.9 beta one and beta two.¹²⁷

While at home in Portola Valley, California, Jay Verkler kept in touch with the engineers who had just started running tests when the time came for the October 2005 general conference to begin. Jay Verkler and the team broke off from their work to listen. President Hinckley caught them and the rest of the department by surprise when he announced that the Church had been “engaged for some time in a very difficult undertaking” to have computers reduce ordinance duplication.¹²⁸ When President Hinckley observed, “Preliminary indications are that it will work,” Verkler looked across his office at the display where the first iteration of the system and saw it spitting out a stream of errors from the test error logs and mused, “Oh, that’s our system.”¹²⁹ For the time being, the department handled the inquiries of the curious with an inconclusive statement to family history center directors: “The project is under development, but is nearing completion.”¹³⁰ The delivery would not be for another two years, though that was not known at the time.

Release 0.9 beta one ran in late 2005 with a complete data set. Before the end of the year, 2,700 volunteers had tested it.¹³¹ The test results dealt a blow to the engineers, revealing that they had failed to understand the data. During a search, beta one matched all the data, bringing together all instances of a single person, which sometimes totaled in the thousands. The computer then fanned out to retrieve every person related to that individual, a process that could take a very long time. Consequently, a user might report, “Every time I hit this particular person, the system never comes back. It just dies.”¹³² In reality, it took hours to retrieve all the data about the people related to the person being searched. They referred to such persons internally as IOUSs (pronounced I-OWE-YOU-Ss), or Individuals of Unusual Size—an engineering joke derived from the rodents of unusual size described in the book and movie *The Princess Bride*.¹³³

This problem partly arose because Church members had been submitting pedigree charts and family group sheets to the department since the advent of the Four-Generation program in the 1960s. Over time, people submitted the same names multiple times. Likewise, they often duplicated temple ordinances, sometimes even hundreds of times. The department only realized the massive scale of the duplication with the release 0.9 beta one. Ironically, the department had to build a system that combined and comprehended the data to realize that the system could not effectively manage the data.¹³⁴

As a result of the 0.9 beta one tests, Verkler reported that the department had built a house, but now they must now metaphorically rip out all the plumbing and the electrical wiring.¹³⁵ The department scheduled forty major system changes before beta two testing would begin in 2006.¹³⁶ Release 0.9 beta two imported the data for a second time to fit a new data model that accommodated multiple instances of the same individual.¹³⁷ The department released Beta two in December 2006 but not publicly.¹³⁸ The official response to the query about the delivery date of the system—the correct response for employees—was, “No release dates have been announced.”¹³⁹

Member Needs

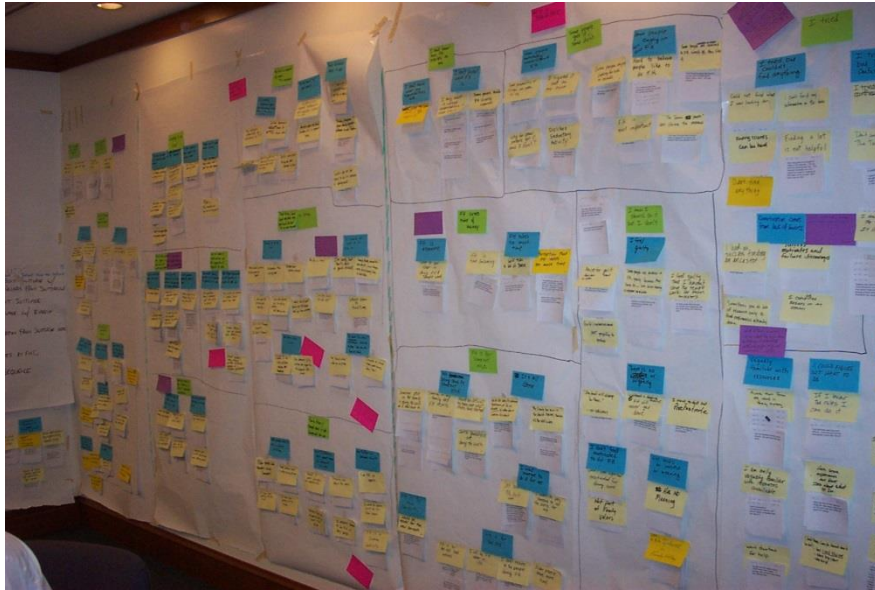
Concurrent with the engineering effort, the Member Needs division formed in 2002 engaged in the task of identifying the needs of Church members with the purpose of broadening participation in family history. They sought to discover what products and services could be developed to engage those with little research expertise, referred to as the “ordinary” members of the Church. The department hoped that if the Unified System met the needs of this segment, it would also serve the enthusiasts, those with genealogical expertise.¹⁴⁰

The personnel in Member Needs were primarily product managers whose task was to connect the work of the computer engineers with the needs of those who used the system. They sought to create software that served the users rather than just satisfied the engineers. The Member Needs unit investigated the situation faced by Church members through a business process known as “contextual inquiry.” In the words of Craig Miller, the Member Needs director, “It’s a discipline where you go and instead of interviewing people like a focus group and asking them what they need, you stand back and learn what they actually are trying to accomplish.” Staff members began their work by observing family history processes at selected sites worldwide, with the major purpose of finding out why people did or did not do family history work.¹⁴¹ They sought to craft an automated system to meet member needs, hoping to discover how to involve a broader range of members in family history work.

When Jim Greene received the assignment to head up the contextual inquiry, he immediately recognized the problem of investigating non-enthusiasts, telling his supervisor, “You know, it’s really hard to do a true contextual inquiry of somebody not doing family history work.” Interviewing those not engaged in family history work became part of the process. Once the data was collected, personnel from around the department gathered around a large table to interpret the data from different points of view and determine the causes and attitudes behind the behaviors that had been observed. This work resulted in “key learnings,” a list of key findings from which personnel drew maps of how people used the means at their disposal to accomplish a task.¹⁴² As part of the process, they covered the walls of a conference room with diagrams, photos of Church members from around the world, and statements from interviewees. This information helped all to trust the product managers when they said, “This is really important.”¹⁴³

The research confirmed the conclusions of earlier studies. A non-enthusiast was turned off by the “strict ways” of entering names, dates, and places and documenting information. When a

few interviewees heard the word *research*, it affected them “like fingernails on a chalkboard or a visit to a dentist.” Likewise, the inquiry confirmed that name submission was more likely to happen when “priesthood leadership had a testimony of family history work.”¹⁴⁴



Contextual Inquiry Wall Notes Courtesy Fran Jensen

The final result of the contextual inquiry was the creation of a set of requirements for an automated solution that would improve the process. Engineers in the department estimated that it would take at least 10 years to build a system that met the requirements. Months of meetings followed in which team members reduced the requirements to a bare minimum to begin the process of incremental development, expecting to add the other features and functions over time. They likened this simplification process to surgery by asking, “For you to live, do you really need two arms? Do you need any arms? How about legs? . . . You have two kidneys; you don’t need them both. You have two lungs; you don’t need them both. OK, the brain, there’s only one of those. Eyes, do you really need eyes at all?” They called the product they resolved to create “‘Stumpy’ because [they] were chopping [pieces off] right and left, trying to get it down to something that was deliverable.”¹⁴⁵

In June 2007, when the department began the delivery of the Unified System, it was just a small part of the total experience they had envisioned at the beginning of the process. The product partially met the needs of two audiences—those with little computer experience who desired a step-by-step approach and those who were genealogical enthusiasts already familiar with the computer. Craig Miller described the early system as a “mishmash” of the two that did not sufficiently meet the needs of either group. The first group liked to be guided through each step in the process of submitting a name, while this pace frustrated those who already knew the “game plan.”¹⁴⁶ In their assessment of the system, the first group was more complimentary than the latter. According to Craig Miller, the director of Member Needs, “People either give us high praise, or they tell us, ‘You guys are the stupidest people on the earth.’”¹⁴⁷

First Release of new FamilySearch

Anticipating a 2007 release, the department determined that they would deliver the Common Pedigree initially as new FamilySearch.¹⁴⁸ This decision reversed a marketing decision made at a lower level in the department earlier in 2006 to release the product as the Family Tree.¹⁴⁹

Department leadership realized that the public naming of the system could be tricky, especially since the initial release of the system would be available only to members of the Church. If the name of this exciting new system gained too much visibility and momentum, it could find itself established as a new brand in the minds of members and the general public, competing with the FamilySearch brand name. The system could not yet be placed under FamilySearch.org because it was not available to the general public and would only create a feeling of exclusion and possible confusion, so brand competition from a separate system with a separate name was an increased risk. Department leadership chose the name new FamilySearch as an intentionally temporary name that could easily disappear when the full replacement, FamilySearch.org came into being and the Common Pedigree morphed into the Family Tree component of that system.

Delivering new FamilySearch to temple districts throughout the Church was a multiyear effort. Planning for the rollout began in 2005. The department sent draft documents that would accompany the rollout up the management chain for review. Consonant with Church leadership principles, the documents suggested pervasive involvement of local priesthood leadership. The counsel came back to avoid taxing local leaders already overburdened and to deliver the system “in a very deliberate, nonintrusive manner that will limit the impact on local priesthood leaders.”¹⁵⁰ The department softened the burden by relying on family history channels rather than priesthood channels for the technical aspects of the rollout.

As the developers tested the various releases, they migrated (or brought into the system) ordinance and genealogical data a total of three times. The system could not be released without a third and final migration of the data to clean up errors discovered in the first and second migrations. The first two data migrations took about 15 months each. The third was more complex because of the amount of checking scheduled to reduce errors. Developers estimated in November 2006 that the third data migration would take 14 to 24 months, clearly unacceptable given the pressure to have the system go public.

Verkler put his best engineers on the problem, forming a “data dream team,” and set a goal of June 2007 for the long-awaited 0.9 production release, including the third data migration.¹⁵¹ The seven-month goal seemed impossible to achieve. The data migration would push the software design changes, new hardware, and new storage to the limit. All of these dimensions needed rethinking to achieve such an aggressive schedule. The team met every morning with Verkler to discuss their progress and challenges. Often, the dream team had fortuitous assistance as time progressed toward the June 2007 release. For example, they faced an insurmountable limitation in the speed of the disk storage system, but more storage units unexpectedly became available in a matter of hours. A shipment of units, originally intended for use in a department facility in Ashburn, Virginia, was incorrectly routed to Utah, which ultimately was exactly where needed. Immediately put to use, these storage units enabled the team to finish the task on schedule.¹⁵² In

the end, the team completed the task in six months, less than half of the time of the best-case scenario of the original forecast.¹⁵³



As the team focused on the release date of June 26, 2007, some despaired of meeting the deadline. New problems and "bad news" were often reported from a variety of development and infrastructure teams. While some

asked, "Why are we doing this impossible thing?" others fasted and prayed. The entire product team pushed every day to overcome what seemed like constant challenges in the face of the June 26 deadline.

The system came up live on June 22, just before the release. As a final and personal system check on June 24, Verkler submitted and cleared names from his own ancestry, this time for real, not as a test.¹⁵⁴ The release date arrived, and in an email sent just after midnight on the morning of June 27, Verkler excitedly announced to all department staff that on the previous day new FamilySearch had been launched in the St. Louis Temple district. "Recorded ordinances began to arrive at headquarters by 9:00 a.m.," he reported. After years of testing, the live system provided a "much more powerful experience" in doing work for actual ancestors. Verkler cautioned that the system still had "warts and problems that many of us see because we are so close to the issues." Still, in inaugurating the new system, he said, "It is important for us also to step back and appreciate how the overall attributes of the system will change family history work."¹⁵⁵ In accordance with the development philosophy, the system was updated quarterly after being launched.¹⁵⁶ The department dealt with "warts and problems" over time.

For a number of reasons, the department rolled the system out slowly to the various temple districts over several years. The ability to support the system at headquarters could easily have been overwhelmed with the volume of inquiries that would have been generated by a rapid release. The Temple Department preferred a slower rollout to minimize risks in the temple process.¹⁵⁷ A slower rollout also permitted system changes along the way, giving time to eliminate problems noted early in the process.¹⁵⁸

In each temple district, the department began the rollout process 120 days before the system became available by notifying local priesthood leaders and General Authorities overseeing the temples involved. At 90 days out, it sent out information packets to family history center directors and ward family history. Concurrently, it sent out installation workbooks and training

materials to the temples. In addition, it provided training modules over the Internet. Approval to go live came 14 days before the launch date. When the launch day finally dawned, Church members in a temple district could begin using new FamilySearch for all name submissions and the temple could start using the new version of ORS that aligned with the new system.¹⁵⁹

The screenshot displays the FamilySearch interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like Home, Me and My Ancestors, Search, Add Information, and Temple Ordinances. Below this, a 'Family Pedigree with Details' section shows a tree structure with names like William Jacob Anderson, Thomas Remus Anderson, Hinrich O. Anderson, Emma J. Leeman, Stephen Anderson, Cherry Jones, David Jones, and Mary Jacobs. To the right of the pedigree are buttons for 'Add or find husband' and 'Add or find wife'. Below the pedigree, a detailed view for 'Mary Jacobs (1925-) Living' is shown. It includes a summary, details, LDS Ordinances, Time Line, Map, Parents and Siblings, Spouses and Children, and Possible Duplicates. The details section shows her name, gender (Female), birth date (2 February 1925), birth location (San Diego, San Diego, California, United States), and death. A table of contributors is also visible.

Contributors
Steve
Steve
Steve
Add

With over 120 temples in the rollout plan, many temples simultaneously received the system each week. Brent Summerhays functioned metaphorically as an “air traffic controller,” using a huge chart that listed temples and each system envisioned as a plane on a 120-day landing pattern to that temple.¹⁶⁰ In the last half of 2007, eleven temple districts received new FamilySearch, eight in the

Pedigree Display in new FamilySearch Courtesy Family History Department

United States and one each in Canada, Mexico, and Guatemala.¹⁶¹ Most temple districts received the system in 2008, but the high-volume temples along the Wasatch Front in Utah and Idaho had to wait until late 2009, with the Salt Lake Temple district being the last of the 120 to receive it.¹⁶² The department made these temples wait partly because of the problems it anticipated dealing with the massive duplication and inconsistencies in the ancestral data of multigenerational members who lived there.¹⁶³ Thus, in 2009 the department completed the four-year process of delivering the new system to all temples, except for five Asian temples which subsequently received it in the fall of 2010.

As noted above, the department delivered the system concurrently to temples inside and outside of the United States. To serve international audiences, the department began translating and localizing the computer screens and documentation of new FamilySearch in 2004.¹⁶⁴ Previously, the normal process was to perfect the text in English and then translate it after publication; but the release method of the new system required simultaneous translation of the user interface as the system was being written in English.¹⁶⁵ A new translation method and process was needed to simultaneously release to multiple languages. The Church’s Translation Division provided the expertise while Family History provided the funding. The department also purchased translation software packages to reduce the labor and speed up the delivery of foreign texts in 10 principal languages, reaching most Church members in text they could read.¹⁶⁶ The international rollout had significantly more challenges than the rollout in the United States, particularly in areas of new Church membership. For example, in Asia, the department encountered the challenge of getting members to begin their family history work and training leaders to direct their efforts. In the Pacific Islands and part of Asia, it dealt with an

undeveloped technological infrastructure and Church members with little technological expertise.¹⁶⁷ Similar circumstances existed throughout the developing world.

Data Challenges

The database of new FamilySearch combined the records of the living with those of the deceased, permitting a Church member to see his or her record and the ancestral lines linked to it. In 2003, the data migration project team began to work on compiling into one database all data from previous systems: Ancestral File, Pedigree Resource File, and Ordinance Data Management. It also included basic information on all living Church members from the Church Membership Department.¹⁶⁸ The department took great care in the system architecture to allow access to information about a living person to only that person and his or her descendants.¹⁶⁹

The primary challenge was to sift through a massive data compilation of approximately 1.4 billion names and associated information and deliver understandable and easy to use content. To reduce the clutter of duplicates in the file and enhance the checking of new names against the file, engineers merged many duplicates automatically. Rather than using the department's traditional method of merging duplicates, known as probabilistic matching, the engineers used a new method called deterministic record matching.¹⁷⁰ In the deterministic approach, a human evaluator decided whether two names matched by the computer were really a match. Given enough samples, the computer theoretically learned what constituted a duplicate and what did not. In all, the engineers merged 350 million of the 1.4 billion names, leaving a little more than a billion names to display.¹⁷¹

To avoid new duplicate entries, new FamilySearch limited the ability to upload large numbers of names at a single time. Because it already had data from Ancestral File and the Pedigree Resource File, engineers worried that submitters would introduce new duplicates with massive submissions. Consequently, the department limited submissions from data management software in the GEDCOM format to a thousand persons per submission.¹⁷²

In addition to duplicates, the database had other serious errors and inconsistencies that required much time and expense to fix.¹⁷³ One problem, referred to as a looping pedigree, was created when an individual appeared as his or her own ancestor or descendent. Such a loop might be caused by a matching algorithm or a patron submitting incorrect linking data. Eliminating the loop was a very complex process of disconnecting and recombining records.¹⁷⁴ Gary Stokes, in charge of product engineering at the time, commented: "There were a lot of pieces of data that were incomplete or just incorrect in the system. . . . There were a lot of tools we had to write to go in and remove bad parts of the data [and] clean up the data so that it was able to be represented."¹⁷⁵

The final product frustrated some users. Much of the problem was not the system itself; rather, the data authored by many, some of whom provided erroneous or variant name spellings, dates, places, and relationships. One user commented, "It's complicated. . . . My parents are FamilySearch support missionaries. I sat down with them one evening, and my mother and I spent an hour trying to fix this one particular problem. At the end of the hour, we were able to

fix it together, but wow, it's not easy."¹⁷⁶ A patron in Alabama wrote, "I just began using new FamilySearch tonight, and I am about ready to scream!!! There are people added to the family groups who are not in the family and all sorts of incorrect information, and it is not linked up properly, and I don't have a clue how to rearrange it. . . . It will take me years to fix all of this mess, and I really don't want to spend my time doing it. Just thought I would vent to you. I feel an ulcer coming on!"¹⁷⁷ Most problematic to researchers who had spent years compiling and verifying information was to have an uninformed user update the file on a whim.



Consultant Assisting a User Courtesy The Church

The system greatly pleased many. People discovered living cousins, established contact, and shared information. One person wrote, "Wow! I wonder how many of us have had the same experience. As I have been comparing my database to new FamilySearch and see the gaps, I have been researching online and ordering more film and making contact with heretofore unknown distant cousins in Australia, England, and various U.S. states. Without nFS [new FamilySearch], I wouldn't have felt the need to clean up

stuff that I thought was in good shape, and therefore I wouldn't have found more info to add. What a great by-product." A family history consultant wrote, "When I trained my stake [president], he claimed he could 'barely type, knew little about computers, and was sparse on his knowledge of his own family history.' Yet, 45 minutes later, he was proudly waving three temple submissions and was excited to go to the meeting to tell our stake leaders about new FamilySearch.org. The blessings of this new system will ring throughout the world."¹⁷⁸

After release 0.9, engineers continued upgrading the system, resulting in alpha and beta testing for each release that would follow, beginning with 0.91 in 2007 and continuing through to release 0.99 in December 2009. Among many other changes, the engineers made improvements to the search function and the search results by allowing users to enter standardized dates and places, view sources of the data, and combine duplicates. Engineers also improved the pedigree display.¹⁷⁹ The testing continued as an iterative process to create a finely tuned product.

To serve members without computers or computer skills, new FamilySearch also provided an option to use paper for those who did not want to use a computer. The program began with a workshop in a Sunday School class, based on a one-page instruction sheet. A Church member could then fill out a card with an ancestor's name and basic information, and a family history consultant could enter the information into a computer using the helper option in the system in behalf of the member.¹⁸⁰

Computer Hardware

The department expenditure on information technology began to climb in 1999 as it began to deliver systems to many more users over the Internet. Ultimately, amounts in the millions of dollars poured into creating an infrastructure to store and provide immediate access to petabytes of digitized text and images. (A petabyte is one million gigabytes.) Hosting this amount of data was a leap into the unknown for an organization that had depended previously on hosting services to manage these details on a far smaller scale. To host servers for the new website, the department began in 2004 to build a primary data facility at a huge Internet hub leased from Equinix in Ashburn, Virginia. To provide a backup and testing facility, it established a second server center in West Jordan, Utah, with a constantly-updated duplicate of the data at the Ashburn site.¹⁸¹ The two centers allowed for redundancy, preventing loss in the case of catastrophic failure at one of the sites. Each center had a 12-petabyte capacity.¹⁸²

The infrastructure team had never built a system of such immense size before. The first time they did the wiring in West Jordan in February 2005, the cables were all over in total disarray. After being told this result was unacceptable, the team spent a “long all-nighter” re-cabling the facility. The Ashburn site had an entirely new organization, staffed by on-site volunteers who performed any required physical tasks under the direction of Salt Lake headquarters. The logistics were complicated and there was no precedent for accomplishing such a task with lay volunteers rather than professionals. Though department employees had serious concerns about using volunteers to build and operate the center, they jumped into recruiting a group from the local area. About thirty-five from the local Church stake volunteered. Among the many physical tasks, this volunteer group rapidly installed hundreds of computers from two semitrailer loads of equipment.¹⁸³

Outside observers said they had never seen this number of people show up for a volunteer project and commented on how well-organized they were. Thereafter, the technical staff in Salt Lake City ran the data center remotely with local volunteer assistance. The stake ended up calling it their “stake farm,” a reference to the common practice of a stake operating a real farm as part of its welfare effort.¹⁸⁴ The department designed the software system with substantial redundancy so that computer and single-network outages would not impact the delivery of service to customers.¹⁸⁵ In an impressive demonstration of the redundancy, the servers in Ashburn were physically moved from a smaller to a larger building during a two-week period in August 2008 without once interrupting the operation of new FamilySearch.¹⁸⁶

Concurrently, the department upgraded other computer infrastructure not directly related to new FamilySearch. It built a high capacity computer network link between the Granite Mountain Records Vault and the main Church computer network in Salt Lake City.¹⁸⁷ This network link delivered images from the vault to FamilySearch Internet without the manual step of transporting them on a shuttle. The department also purchased equipment for system development and testing. Whereas laptop computers had been a rarity previously, they became the norm for computer engineers and soon spread to a large number of other staff.

The department transformed during this period in a rapid and breathtaking fashion. When Verkler came to the department, engineers at the Church were programming in old languages on old operating systems, even though most of the industry programming had moved to using web-oriented languages on newer, server-based operating systems. Within two or three years, engineers came from all over the U.S. and even some from international areas to see what department engineers were doing to build new FamilySearch because the work being done was so advanced and so cutting edge; and those visitors left impressed.¹⁸⁸

Personnel Transformation

The department required a large, skilled, talented, and well-trained staff to build such a massive, complex system. The department had to overcome the fact that the Church did not offer industry-competitive wages to software developers. In addition, potential employees might hesitate to work for a nontechnical bureaucracy. The largest pool of local programmers lived in Utah Valley, to the south of Salt Lake, and working at department headquarters would require a long commute. The department had difficulty hiring competent computer engineers in 1998.¹⁸⁹ The situation continued through 2000, when the Executive Directors noted: “The department faces critical shortages of technical FTEs (full-time equivalents) because of an inability to attract qualified applicants for open positions and the continuing departure of existing personnel.”¹⁹⁰

The department had a critical need to hire new staff. In November 2002, the department assessed the number of staff who could be qualified for web development in less than six months and discovered only one engineer had the required skill level.¹⁹¹ Commenting on the difficulty of recruiting competent engineers in 2002, Jay Verkler noted later that the department had to go after the kind of quality people who never had to look for a job because “jobs always find them.” He instituted the recruiting culture he had learned in Silicon Valley that aggressively sought new talent to create the envisioned master system.¹⁹² The department began to recruit new employees and managers with up-to-date skills and worked on raising the technological skill of current employees.

Once talent it had located the talent, the department had to overcome another obstacle. In the director’s meeting in October 2002, it was noted that “outstanding technical people often [had to] make significant personal sacrifices to be able to afford to work for the Church.”¹⁹³ An example, if Daniel Rapp accepted the position offered by the department in the fall of 2002; he would have had to take a large cut in base pay and suffer a cut in overall pay because the Church did not offer bonuses and stock options. While it was reasonable to expect a lower salary from a nonprofit organization, the magnitude of the cut was so large it would have required him to sell his home, move, and uproot his family. A similar sacrifice would have been required for other computer engineers.

Shortly thereafter, the department increased the wage scale for engineers. Within a month, Daniel received an increased offer that was still a significant cut in wages but was workable for him, and he accepted.¹⁹⁴ In lieu of money, there were other incentives for prospective employees. Jim Greene related the reason he accepted an employment offer: “I had an

experience in the temple that just convinced me that money was not everything, that the Lord had guided my life and had given me talents, and had poured his tender mercies on me in many different ways, and now it was time to pay back. So I made the leap.”¹⁹⁵ Brad Christensen described his feeling when he learned about the project, “I felt as though someone had poured warm milk over me, just the strongest feelings that I had to be involved in this thing.”¹⁹⁶ About these and other employees, Jay Verkler observed, “They gave up something real, not abstract; theirs was not a perceived sacrifice but a real sacrifice.”¹⁹⁷

With a more moderate reduction from the industry wage and often by means of a spiritual prompting, prospective hires accepted offers for positions, and the department began to build a “fundamentally new capability.”¹⁹⁸ In 2003, the department hired 40 engineers and six product managers. Engineers built the system, and product managers ensured that it met user requirements. The department continued aggressively to recruit and hire more engineers in 2004.¹⁹⁹

Jay Verkler brought in some high-level executives from the digital and information industries. In some cases, they were independently wealthy and accepted the offer to serve for the challenge rather than for the pay. On occasion, a minor detail or two needed to be cleared up. Serving as a consultant to the department, Russell Stay told Jay Verkler, “I don’t mind continuing to provide my time for free, but it really kind of bothers me to have to keep paying five dollars a day for parking privileges. I’d really like to have a parking spot.” Verkler kept saying, “Yes, we’ll take care of that.” After a month with no change, Stay finally said, “Tell you what, when you get that parking thing worked out, let me know, and I’ll come back and continue helping.” He disappeared for two weeks. Verkler called and asked, “Where have you been for the last couple of weeks?” Stay reminded him of the parking spot. Two days later he got a call from Human Resources saying, “We’ve got a parking spot for you; come on in, and we’ll give you your badge,” which meant he was now an employee and had a parking spot.²⁰⁰

In addition to hiring new employees, the department encouraged current employees to learn and provided opportunities for them to update their skills. Symptomatic of the aging skills of its employees, the department had released a system in 2000 based on the VMS (Virtual Memory System) operating system, moribund as an operating system in 1993. The department had used this system because its engineers had expertise in VMS.²⁰¹ As skills were updated, the department transitioned from the C++ language, suited for stand-alone applications, to Java, suited for the Internet delivery of new FamilySearch.²⁰² The department brought in outside trainers to teach staff on Java and system development, and it implemented the newly adopted methodology for testing and releasing products.²⁰³ In addition to the new programming language and operating environment, the department adopted a new operating system, Linux, in lieu of older operating systems. The department made these changes while at the same time developing a new product under the direction of a new management team.²⁰⁴

When employees in any area of the department retired, their employment slots went into a strategic reserve controlled by Verkler. He used these slots for new hires in newly created positions that accomplished the redefinition of the department’s primary task. A decision of

Church President Gordon B. Hinckley to institute an early retirement buy-out assisted in this process by freeing up 50 positions.²⁰⁵ The department made an effort to help non-programmers displaced by organization changes to find employment elsewhere.²⁰⁶ As a result, within a few years the number of software engineers increased from about 70 to near 200.²⁰⁷

Jay Verkler was demanding of the new staff. Many employees spent many extra hours and weekends working on the new system.²⁰⁸ He worked long hours himself, holding meetings in the evenings when the work day did not provide sufficient time to accomplish the task at hand.²⁰⁹

The Church employment system was not able to easily handle a new compensation structure. Consequently, the department hired software engineers as contractors. Later, it implemented a model using a payroll services vendor that enabled substantial cost savings over the contractor model.²¹⁰ In both cases, the new hires signed a five-year contract. When these contracts began to expire in 2007 and much of new FamilySearch was still under development, the department converted 122 of these contracted employees to regular employees.²¹¹ At the same time, it brought in other new hires to all areas of the department, with the result that by the end of 2011, 65 percent of the staff had been hired since 2002.²¹²

Along with its new composition, the department implemented business procedures to ensure that the benefit gained from hiring new employees equaled the cost. It sought to transform the work culture to encourage staff to focus on ultimate goals and results, a “bottom line” mentality.²¹³ The less rigorous approach of the previous era had ended.

Mike Bowen, who directed this new engineering staff, later observed: “The organization [went] through some very significant growing pains as an engineering organization. The way I would characterize them is [that] we had all of the growth pains of a new startup because we grew by almost double in about a year. . . . We didn’t have all the expertise we needed, so we brought in expertise wherever we could find it, and we found a lot of great people. But we were also [too] immature as an organization to be that big, lacking in the kinds of processes that we needed to be that size. We had processes that weren’t too bad for the size we’d been, but we were very immature to be twice that big and to grow that fast. . . . Given the lack of structure that we had when they came, they were left a lot to just do whatever they could. That left, I think, a lot of frustration for them, for me, and for a lot of the people who worked here. So it was a hard time.”²¹⁴

The chief product manager, Brad Christensen, commented after his departure to other employment on those who could not accept these growing pains: “There are so many in the department that are negative and every morning wake up to a bowl of negative and then have a steady diet of negative throughout the day and then go home and come back and do it all again. . . . We spent many, many, many hours talking about how to overcome that problem, but people being people, sometimes hang onto things that aren’t beneficial to them or the group.” Personally, Christensen witnessed new FamilySearch change lives and involve people previously uninvolved in family history work. He envisioned that within 30 years, the



President Henry B. Eyring and FamilySearch Development Staff Courtesy The Church

percentage of the Church participating in the program because of new FamilySearch would no longer be just a “small club.”²¹⁵

Bringing in many talented people from strongly diverse backgrounds made it virtually impossible to generate a strong development process quickly because department personnel had to create new processes and methods for doing the work. Against the backdrop of the hopelessly optimistic expectation of when the task could be done; there were simply too many people, too much change, and too little time. The department developed a strategic plan and then brought in a new staff that did not know the plan. Their success can be attributed to the extraordinary dedication of staff in overcoming challenges due to such things as management mistakes, bad decisions, and the uncertain future before them.²¹⁶

The length and continual demand of the development effort could be exhausting. From 2005 through June 2007, engineers and managers at all levels worked long hours. They constantly ran tests, migrated data, and implemented quality processes, the results of which provided constant new insights but also required oversight and attention. At all staff levels, the department coordinated the development at meetings not once, but three times a day (early morning, late afternoon, and late evening). It immediately organized “tiger teams” and “triage” efforts when new problems arose. Engineering staff remained always on-call in case their part of the system needed attention.²¹⁷

Shortly after the Church released the system in 2007, Elder Henry B. Eyring spoke to the product staff. He said, “You know, I’ve wondered [through] all the pushing that you all did and that Jay’s done, if Jay was pushing too hard. After my thoughts and revelation last night, [I wonder if Jay] might not have pushed you guys hard enough. This is really important and really opposed, and it’s very important that . . . this help hasten the work.”²¹⁸

Name Submission Policy

Technological change presaged an important policies decision regarding name submission. While the department restricted submissions for temple ordinances to a member’s ancestors, it also found that automated systems for research and collaboration helped broaden Church members’ opportunity to avoid duplicate ancestral research and names submissions. In the 1930s, the department had instituted the use of pedigree charts. These pedigree charts began with the present and looked backward, which helped Church members focus their research on their direct-line ancestors and to see their connection to these ancestors.²¹⁹ The practice arose—sometimes encouraged by department policy—of researching direct line ancestors only and ignoring collateral lines, or the relatives of ancestors who share a common ancestor. Because many Church members shared the same ancestry, the pedigree chart assisted Church members to avoid duplicating research efforts and name submissions by focusing on tracing the families of those on the chart rather than collateral lines. Nevertheless, the statements of Church presidents were not so restrictive, referring only to the members’ obligation to provide ordinances for their ancestors.

The first step in the direction of broadening the scope of a member’s ancestral obligation was taken in a letter to Church leaders dated July 14, 1994. President Boyd K. Packer wrote: “Members of the Church as individuals and families are responsible to identify their own direct-line ancestral families and see that temple ordinances are performed for them. They may also do family history research and temple work for their deceased relatives who are collaterally related (not their direct lines).”²²⁰ New FamilySearch provided genealogical information on collateral lines and the associated ordinance data, obviating the need to restrain members from researching only those names on their pedigree chart, but delving into the ancestry of cousins. Additionally, while considering submission policies to govern the functionality of new FamilySearch, the First Presidency authorized name submission for descendants of a members’ ancestor.²²¹

The Church did not publicize the policy publicly until 2007 in an article by George D. Durrant published in the *Ensign*, called “Branching Out on Your Family Tree.” This article encouraged readers to research entire ancestral families, not just the direct line of the research.²²² The department formalized this kind of research in the new FamilySearch *User’s Guide*, an online document released with new FamilySearch, which specifically stated that members could perform ordinances for “descendants of direct-line ancestors and their families.”²²³ As this policy percolates through the consciousness of Church members, it will invigorate those who have just pursued ancestry into the past as they then begin from the past and move forward to the present.

New FamilySearch also expanded the scope of submitting names from cultures in which the records did not provide dates and places for vital events. Although department leadership extensively discussed the issue in the late 1990s, they had failed to come up with an automated system that could both clear a name without an event place and date and still permit some control over duplicate submissions.²²⁴ This problem precluded many submissions from new congregations in Africa. New FamilySearch resolved the problem by clearing names when a date and place were recorded for any deceased person in a lineage.²²⁵

Ordinance Duplication

Duplicate information and multiple ordinances for the same individual were clearly evident in new FamilySearch data, a problem also true of its predecessor, the IGI. The problem reflected two factors: computers have limited matching capacity, and users can overlook or reject evidence placed before them. It may be easier to press a button and do all the ordinances that the system says are available rather than to review possible duplicate ordinances, find supporting documentation, and merge duplicate records.

Though the department attempted to create a complete ordinance file in the decade before 1995, the data still had holes. In the 1980s, the completion-check process to ensure that all films were extracted and the files properly loaded was a manual process, and some films were missed, though added later. Another hole in the data was created by individuals born less than 110 years earlier, who had received temple ordinances while they were living, but who had since passed away. If the system did not include a death date, their records in the system would not include information about their temple ordinances. In such cases, a Church member with Utah pioneer ancestry might scratch his head, wondering why a faithful grandpa was never endowed and then submit the name for proxy work.

On the technology side, computer algorithms for matching records were not very reliable because of incomplete data or variations in dates or in the spellings of names and places. Hence, after the release of the Ordinance Index in 1997, the department still recommended that in addition to using TempleReady for an automated matching check, Church members search for each name in the Ordinance Index and Ancestral File (which at the time contained ordinances reported by members on their family group sheets).²²⁶

In addition to the holes in the data, the availability of ordinance data lagged behind the recording of the ordinances. The department issued the data infrequently, publishing it on compact disc only in 1993, 1997, and 2000. Temple records extracted through the Family Records Extraction Program (FREP) in the early 1990s were not delivered in their entirety to the IGI until 1997; six years after TempleReady began to check against this file to avoid duplicate ordinances.²²⁷ When the department finally delivered the IGI online in 2002, it kept the file updated at least weekly.²²⁸ However, the department did not provide an automated means to check records against information in this file, which limited its usefulness. As a consequence, when Church members checked for duplicate ordinances, they often did so using an incomplete ordinance file.

The duplication problem seemed to be intractable. In 2002, Executive Directors lamented that a yearlong effort in 2001 had “resulted in no significant net reduction” in duplicate ordinances. Technology had not solved the problem. They observed that “a substantial percentage of ordinance duplication results from computer systems previously built and the assumptions that were made at the time they were built.”²²⁹ Still, they hoped for improvement, as did other Church leaders. In his opening remarks at the October 2005 general conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley noted: “One of the most troublesome aspects of our temple activity is that as we get more and more temples scattered across the earth there is duplication of effort in proxy work. . . . To avoid such duplication, the solution lies in complex computer technology.”²³⁰ He found the rate of duplication unacceptable and made his feelings clear to the department.²³¹

The long-term goal of the department as enunciated by Jay Verkler was to keep duplication under one percent.²³² Initially, new FamilySearch did not solve the problem, and the duplication rate remained significant.²³³ During 2008, the duplication of baptisms dropped precipitously from 26 percent in January 2008 to below 10 percent in June. It then remained steady between 6 and 10 percent through December.²³⁴ In November 2010, the department calculated the duplication rate at 7 percent.²³⁵ This percentage is the same as the historical rate detected in the name-clearance process prior to 1980.²³⁶ It was significantly lower than the duplication percentage in 2002 with TempleReady submissions, which was in the high 20s.²³⁷ By 2011, the goal had not yet been achieved, although the department had made good progress.

Both the system and the users contributed to the problem. A study in December 2008 determined that the predominant cause of ordinance duplication was the failure of patrons to examine possible duplicates as suggested by new FamilySearch.²³⁸ When the system indicated an ordinance had not been performed, this notification might have only meant that an ordinance in the system had not yet been matched to that name. A careless submitter could easily submit and perform a duplicate ordinance. Other researchers might be misled by their data. Records do not always provide consistent data, and variations in places and dates might have been recorded multiple times. For instance, of the dozen Henry Smiths who lived in Peoria, Illinois, in 1861, it would be difficult to identify a particular ancestor.²³⁹

The Vision of a Lineage-Linked Central Ordinance File

With new FamilySearch, the department realized a century-long desire to create a central lineage-linked resource that permitted Church members to see ancestors in family relationships along with their official ordinance data. Nephi Anderson, an early leader of the Genealogical Society of Utah, enunciated the long-term vision in 1912 when he wrote, “As temples multiply, and the work enlarges to its ultimate proportions, this Society, or some organization growing out of this Society, will have in its care some elaborate, but perfect system of exact registration and checking, so that the work in the temples may be conducted without confusion or duplication.”²⁴⁰

Archibald Bennett, a secretary of the Genealogical Society and a prominent genealogist restated that vision in 1947: “A universal system of intelligent cooperation will bring together on one

record sheet every fact in existence regarding a particular family. This wealth of data will ensure accuracy and banish error. Expensive and time-consuming duplications in research and repetitions of ordinances will be eliminated. No sooner will a new fact be uncovered in any part of the world by a researcher than it will be communicated to the Archives center and be assigned to its proper place, on some family record.”²⁴¹

The long-range plan of 1976, which guided department efforts throughout the last quarter of the 20th century, listed the same goal as the first objective among all department efforts. The department reiterated that objective in a 1996 department statement of purpose and goals, articulated under the leadership of Elder Monte J. Brough, to “continue the development of a central lineage-linked file of completed ordinances.”²⁴² Ancestral File and the International Genealogical Index (IGI) delivered this information separately. Ordinance information in Ancestral File was lineage linked, but subject to omission or error, having been submitted by Church members. The IGI provided official data, but for the most part, it was not lineage linked.

Elder D. Todd Christofferson articulated the long-term vision again in 2005: “We envision a single database combining the best of all our automated databases that people will not simply view but will add to and correct in cooperation with others working on the same lines. Information about temple ordinances will be available to members, showing temple work performed as well as ordinances still needed. . . . Once performed, temple ordinances will be recorded. . . . The system will then not clear that name again for ordinances already performed, thus avoiding wasteful duplication.”²⁴³

New FamilySearch immediately delivered to Church members all that the Church collectively knew about family history and enabled Church members worldwide to augment or correct that information at the touch of a keyboard, anywhere they had an Internet connection, even by an individual sitting at home. In December 2009, Elder Richard J. Maynes, Executive Director, summarized the accomplishment: “Over the years, as members of the Church have submitted names for temple ordinances, they found the process complex and time consuming. This release of new FamilySearch helps members overcome these barriers. The program will help members, even if they are not proficient in technology or genealogy; extend the blessings of the gospel to their ancestors.”

As described in more detail by Craig Miller, the director of Member Needs, the system represented a paradigm shift. Previously, members often worked in isolation with their own family history software. Now they could work together. They no longer began with a blank family group sheet, but could go to new FamilySearch (and later to its successor Family Tree) to see what had already been done.²⁴⁴ Indicating the system’s impact in early 2011, the number of individual members submitting names had increased by 60 percent, from 129,000 in 2007 to 217,000 in 2010, and the number of member-submitted ordinances per year had increased from 35 to 55 million.²⁴⁵ Even with the new system, in 2011 only 2.25 percent of total Church membership submitted names for ordinances, a number the department desired to increase.²⁴⁶

The release of new FamilySearch to all but Asian temples in 2009 followed a tradition going back four decades in which the department offered a milestone automation event in the last year of each decade. It was the 40th anniversary of GIANT, the first automated names system created by the department and the source of the IGI; the 30th anniversary of when the department began accepting submissions of family group sheets and pedigree charts for Ancestral File, the first automated lineage-linked file; the 20th anniversary of when FamilySearch DOS was first deployed to the Family History Library, delivering the IGI and Ancestral File through a personal computer terminal; and the 10th anniversary of FamilySearch Internet, the first use of the Internet to access department databases.²⁴⁷ Creating order from the chaos of records and memories continued to motivate the quest of Church members to provide ordinances for their ancestors and to define the ongoing work of the department to accomplish their vision of a central lineage linked ordinance file successfully.

¹“30 new temples,” *Church News*, April 11, 1998, 3; Gordon B. Hinckley, “New Temples to Provide ‘Crowning Blessings’ of the Gospel,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 88.

²“Church News’ top stories of the 20th Century,” *Church News*, January 23, 1999, and December 18, 1999, 4. The revelation on the priesthood in 1978 extended priesthood authority to all worthy male members of the Church.

³Gordon B. Hinckley, “Some Thoughts on Temples, Retention of Converts, and Missionary Service,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 50.

⁴Gordon B. Hinckley, “New Temples to Provide ‘Crowning Blessings’ of the Gospel,” *Ensign*, May 1998, 88.

⁵Jay L. Verkler, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, July 6, 2011, 5.

⁶*Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 329–32; Ray W. Madsen, oral history, 6.

⁷*Family History Centers Memorandum* 14, no. 1 (April 1993): 3.

⁸Executive Director’s meeting minutes, June 16, 1998.

⁹*News of the Family History Library* 6, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 20.

¹⁰Ray W. Madsen, oral history, 4.

¹¹*Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 321–23.

¹²Ray W. Madsen, oral history, 5.

¹³“Statistics for Ancestral File Data Production,” internal FHD document.

¹⁴“Ancestral File on Compact Disc,” internal FHD document.

¹⁵Ray W. Madsen, oral history, 13.

¹⁶Gerald L. Gary. Christiansen, “Revised Notes, March 5, 2008,” typescript.

¹⁷“FamilySearch II,” September 9, 1996, internal FHD document; Randall W. Bryson, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, October 2, 2008, 1.

¹⁸Ray W. Madsen, oral history, 15–16.

¹⁹“Millions of names on new Pedigree Resource CD,” *Church News*, November 13, 1999, www.ldschurchnews.com/archives.

²⁰Executive Director’s meeting minutes, January 14, 2003.

²¹Family and Church History Department annual report, 1999, 2; “Free Online Genealogy Database Hits 150 Million Names,” FHD email to all employees, March 12, 2007.

²²*Family History Centers Memorandum*, July 28, 2006 (2nd quarter): 4.

²³Ray W. Madsen, oral history, 15.

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- ²⁴James B. Allen, Jessie L. Embry, Kahlile B. Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1995), 325.
- ²⁵*Family History Centers Memorandum* 18, no. 2 (August 1997): 1–2.
- ²⁶*Family History Centers Memorandum* 20, no. 20 (December 1997): 1.
- ²⁷*Family History Centers Memorandum* 20, no. 3 (September 1999): 1.
- ²⁸Executive Director's meeting minutes, October 18, 1994.
- ²⁹Family History Department annual report, 1999, 2.
- ³⁰Executive Director's meeting minutes, April 18, 1999; also January 18, 2000.
- ³¹Family and Church History Department annual report, 2000, 13.
- ³²"Genealogical Software Now Records Information in All Languages," LDS Church news release, January 16, 2001.
- ³³Executive Director's meeting minutes, October 31, 2000.
- ³⁴Ray W. Madsen, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, July 15, 2008, 10.
- ³⁵"PAF Add-Ins for new.FamilySearch.org Now Offered," FHD email to consultants, July 28, 2008.
- ³⁶*Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 309.
- ³⁷Executive Director's meeting minutes, March 21, 1995.
- ³⁸Data compiled from Historical Department Library catalog, accessed January 19, 2011.
- ³⁹Paul Starkey, conversation, August 27, 1993.
- ⁴⁰*Family History Centers Memorandum* 22, no. 2 (July 2001): 2.
- ⁴¹Mike Bowen, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, July 28, 2008, 5.
- ⁴²Rex Peterson, conversation, January 19, 2011.
- ⁴³Executive Director's meeting minutes, February 22, 2000.
- ⁴⁴Richard E. Turley, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, January 20, 2009, 3. To serve its international audience, the department released the Windows version in five languages besides English: French, German, Japanese, Portuguese, and Spanish.
- ⁴⁵Executive Director's meeting minutes, April 9, 2000; also June 13, 2000; September 12, 2000.
- ⁴⁶Mike Bowen, oral history, 6. Some information added by Jay L. Verkler while editing the manuscript, June–October 2012.
- ⁴⁷Executive Director's meeting minutes, February 28, 1995; also April 18, 1995; February 6, 1996.
- ⁴⁸*Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 311.
- ⁴⁹Phyllis Ingram, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, February 4, 2009, 2.
- ⁵⁰*Temple Ordinance Recording*, July 3, 2001, internal Temple Department document, 30.
- ⁵¹Phyllis Ingram, oral history, 7.
- ⁵²*Family History Centers Memorandum* 19, no. 2 (June 1998): 1.
- ⁵³William Rackliffe, "History of Electronic Ordinance Recording in the Temples," personal document, 1–2.
- ⁵⁴William Rackliffe, "History of Electronic Ordinance Recording in the Temples," 2.
- ⁵⁵Tom Peterson, email, January 4, 2011.
- ⁵⁶The number of steps was reduced from 16 to 5, "Family History Update," October 1, 2007, internal FHD PowerPoint, slides 3–4.
- ⁵⁷Information added by Jay L. Verkler while editing the manuscript, June–October 2012.
- ⁵⁸Information added by Jay L. Verkler while editing the manuscript, June–October 2012.
- ⁵⁹*Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 319.
- ⁶⁰*News of the Family History Library* 5, no. 4 (Fall 1993): 20.
- ⁶¹In 1998 the Temple Index Bureau (TIB) cards, predecessor to the IGI, were approved for disposal, leaving only the microfilm copy to search. Executive Director's meeting minutes, February 17, 1998.

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- ⁶²Executive Director's meeting minutes, October 11, 1994.
- ⁶³Phyllis Ingram, oral history, 2–3.
- ⁶⁴The department released the third and final compact disc version of International Genealogical Index and the Ordinance Index addendums in January 2000. Each of these consisted of 31 discs, as compared to the six discs of the original 1995 addendum and 33 discs in the 1993 primary index. This version of the IGI did not include cleared names, the names of persons for whom no ordinances had been performed but whose information had been cleared for that purpose. The department published these names as research resource files, as discussed in the next chapter. *Family History Centers Memorandum* 21, no. 1 (March 2000): 3.
- ⁶⁵ODM Systems, July 2002, internal FHD document.
- ⁶⁶Tom Peterson and Kevin Johnson, conversations with Kahlile Mehr, February 2, 2011.
- ⁶⁷Family and Church History Department annual report, 2002, 8.
- ⁶⁸Executive Director's meeting minutes, September 3, 2002.
- ⁶⁹*Family History Centers Memorandum* 24, no. 1 (January 2003): 2.
- ⁷⁰Phyllis Ingram, oral history, 9.
- ⁷¹*Family History Centers Memorandum* 19, no. 4 (December 1998): 3.
- ⁷²*Family History Centers Memorandum* 19, no. 3 (September 1998): 3.
- ⁷³Executive Director's meeting minutes, January 18, 1994.
- ⁷⁴Reynolds Cahoon, cataloging staff devotional, March 10, 1994, author's notes.
- ⁷⁵Scott Olsen, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, December 17, 2007, author's notes; Randall W. Bryson, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, October 2, 2008, 8; Kent C. Olsen, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, February 11, 2009, 2.
- ⁷⁶Executive Director's meeting minutes, October 12, 1999.
- ⁷⁷Executive Director's meeting minutes, April 25, 2000.
- ⁷⁸Scott Olsen, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, December 17, 2007, author's notes; "Family Ordinance Summary," information sheet for program participants, 2002.
- ⁷⁹Executive Director's meeting minutes, April 17, 2001.
- ⁸⁰Executive Director's meeting minutes, November 16, 2001; Temple Department to Fresno California Temple, "Family Ordinance Summary Pilot Program," December 19, 2001; Temple Department to Santo Domingo Dominican Republic Temple, October 10, 2002.
- ⁸¹Family and Church History Department annual report, 2001, 13.
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- ⁸⁴Executive Director's meeting minutes, June 17, 2003.
- ⁸⁵Executive Director's meeting minutes, June 19, 2001.
- ⁸⁶Mike Bowen, oral history, 3.
- ⁸⁷Jay L. Verkler, oral history, July 6, 2011, 9.
- ⁸⁸Executive Director's meeting minutes, October 8, 2002; also August 19, 2003.
- ⁸⁹"A Plan to Simplify and Accelerate Family History Work," February 16, 2001, internal FHD document, see Doctrine and Covenants 128:24.
- ⁹⁰Jay L. Verkler, oral history, July 6, 2011, 1–2.
- ⁹¹Richard E. Turley, oral history, January 20, 2009, 9–10.
- ⁹²Jay L. Verkler, oral history, February 16, 2012, 21.
- ⁹³Jay L. Verkler, oral history, July 6, 2011, 2–3, 9.
- ⁹⁴Jay L. Verkler, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, August 9, 2011, 7.

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- ⁹⁶Joseph B. Everett, "Department Strategy Timeline," March 2003, internal FHD document, 3; Marilyn Foster, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, August 12, 2008, 3.
- ⁹⁷Jeff Maddy, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, October 29, 2007, author's notes.
- ⁹⁸Russell D. Stay, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, February 2, 2009, 8.
- ⁹⁹Jay L. Verkler, oral history, July 13, 2011, 5–6.
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- ¹⁰³Family and Church History Department annual report, 2002, 7–8.
- ¹⁰⁴Family and Church History Department annual report, 2003, 4.
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- ¹⁰⁶Daniel Rapp, "FCH Department History Update," August 3, 2008, 5, unpublished typescript.
- ¹⁰⁷Gary Stokes, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, July 16, 2008, 3.
- ¹⁰⁸Brad Christensen, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, January 26, 2009, 2.
- ¹⁰⁹Marilyn Foster, oral history, 3.
- ¹¹⁰Jay L. Verkler, oral history, August 9, 2011, 7.
- ¹¹¹Executive Director's meeting minutes, August 17, 2004.
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- ¹⁶¹"Family History Business Meeting," February 13–14, 2008, internal FHD PowerPoint, slide 17.
- ¹⁶²"Family History Department Meeting," September 23–24, 2009, internal FHD PowerPoint, slide 24.
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- ¹⁶⁸Randy Wilson, "Bulk Record Linkage for the Common Pedigree," internal FHD document.
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Chapter 2: Records Access

The Family History Department has developed some of the most comprehensive genealogical databases in the world and has done so at no expense to users of the databases. We have discussed the delivery of lineage-linked databases in the form of new FamilySearch and its predecessors: Ancestral File and Pedigree Resource File. This section will detail the creation of databases for the evidence used to create these conclusion files. The department sponsored the creation of massive indexes on compact disc and then online through FamilySearch Internet (known as FamilySeach.org after 2011). Then it began to digitize images of the sources themselves, which could then be delivered to users through cyberspace. Transitioning from microfilm to digital delivery, it began to take digital images of original documents and create digital copies of microfilms. It engaged hundreds of thousands of volunteers working at home through an online indexing program to provide enhanced access to those images. At the same time, it digitized and indexed books from its collection and engaged others in doing the same for books from their collections. To provide all this content to the public, the department developed the Research Subsystem as the second major component of the Unified System. Later rechristened internally as the Digital Pipeline, the public found it under the “Search” table on FamilySearch.org. As a result, indexed and imaged records provided access in seconds to records previously buried in the archives and libraries of the world, available only in terms of days, months, or years. Equally important to creating digital content was ensuring the preservation of the information and images into the future.

Several department initiatives at the turn of the 21st century paved the way to the realization of making records in one part of the world accessible quickly elsewhere—to index records, publishing them on CD and then later online. Following is a brief look at the indexing program, compact disc publication, and the delivery of FamilySearch Internet, an initial but insufficient product of limited value. Familysearch.org replaced it at the beginning of the century’s second decade with totally new architecture and greatly expanded content.

Name Indexing

At the turn of the century, online searching emerged as a general tool used by millions to access information. This ability fulfilled the long-time dream of researchers to quickly access records by an index. Key information, such as a name, event place, and date, became terms that search systems could use to find individual entries and images. In 1994, the department transitioned from traditional name extraction, done primarily for the purpose of generating information for temple ordinances, to indexing for research purposes.¹ Thereafter, indexing relied on the Universal Data Entry (UDE) personal computer program, which used a process of saving data on floppy discs for mailing to Church headquarters. UDE continued to be used until the transition to FamilySearch indexing over a decade later.²

The department modified various procedures to improve the indexing process. In 1994, it sent paper copies of images to indexers rather than microfilms.³ Unfortunately, the process used at that date did not always produce high-quality images. To overcome this problem, the

department implemented a higher-quality process early in 1998 by sending microfilms to a vendor to create digital images that could then be printed on a laser printer.⁴ The department purchased its own digital scanner in late 1998.⁵ It sent hundreds of thousands of pages out each year to indexers from 1999 to 2001, when it devised a paperless process.

Stephen Valentine, an extraction analyst, wondered if it would not be easier to send the digital image to indexers rather than a paper copy. With this thought in mind, he visited a stake in Bountiful and by chance met Brook Anderson, who had developed a utility to view images. With no funds to back him, Stephen asked Brook to develop a program to have the image and an input template on the same screen. Brook proceeded and eventually was paid as a contractor. He called his product Advanced Data Entry. The department bought the rights to the program in 2000 and deployed it as UDE 5.0 (Windows).⁶ The Windows version enabled extraction from digital images supplied on CD.⁷

Stephen demonstrated a beta version of the system in Pocatello late in 1999. No one there had ever seen a digital version of a document before. This version had a function called anchoring that highlighted portions of the image. When Stephen put the cursor in the template field to extract the birth date, the system highlighted the portion of the image that contained the birth date. The demonstration elicited two types of responses. On the positive side, Stephen recalled, "Everybody just went crazy. They thought it was so amazing." On the negative side, although Stephen cautioned them that they could continue to extract off of microfilm, some failed to hear the message and said "How dare you take away my microfilm! How dare you take away my paper copies! You're telling me I can't participate anymore. This is what keeps me going."⁸

The part of the system seen by the indexers, the front end of the system, had a corresponding back end, where processing occurred. Until the end of 1999, the department controlled the mailing and return receipt of indexing batches through the Records Receiving and Routing System (RARS). RARS did not distinguish whether a roll was partially or fully extracted, which caused havoc in knowing what had yet to be done. Also, the system was not Y2K compliant and therefore could not process information after January 1, 2000. The department created a new system called Extraction Admin System (EASy, with the "y" added to make the acronym pronounceable).⁹ It replaced RARS barely in time, on December 22, 1999.¹⁰

The EASy system had four main components. One component supported the process of assigning batches to stakes—tracking each batch in a stake's inventory, the return receipt of completed batches, and the contact information for each stake director. Between 2000 and 2004, historical information from older tracking files were added to this component. A second component supported the process of receiving batches from stakes and storing the extraction data on a server. A third component, originally designed for correcting and standardizing Ellis Island passenger records, was enhanced to review, correct, and standardize indexing data from vital record batches. A fourth component audited batches when they were initially received to determine the quality of the work in a particular stake, based on a random sample, and to send back batches that did not pass the audit.¹¹

A comparison of the extraction and the indexing programs shows the steady improvement in efficiency and quantity. During the four decades prior to the year 2000, volunteers extracted or indexed 360 million names.¹² The 462 million names indexed from 2000 to 2004 exceeded by 100 million names the output of the first 40 years.¹³ Some of the more significant indexing projects were country level censuses of Great Britain and the United States, Ellis Island, and Civil War Soldiers.

Census Projects

In 1999, the name indexing program produced its first major output, the 1881 British census. It contained 30 million names. The department provided the indexing program and data entry computers, while the Federation of Family History Societies in the United Kingdom provided thousands of volunteer indexers. Transcription began in August 1989 and concluded in May 1995. Church senior missionaries audited the transcription under the direction of Stephen Young, who directed the work in England from 1992 to 1995.¹⁴ Commenting on Stephen's performance, David Rencher, the Family History Library director at the time, said, "Stephen had an absolute talent with nurturing the volunteers, communicating, and just giving them constant feedback and pats on the back of how well they were doing."¹⁵ Released on compact disc in 1999, the census represented the contribution of 2.5 million volunteer hours.¹⁶

The 1880 United States census indexing project emerged from the pre-1994 extraction program. The indexing of the 50 million names in the census began in 1982, two decades before it was published in 2001.¹⁷ It represented 11.5 million hours of volunteer work. Not envisioned as a stand-alone publication when the extraction began, it required a major effort to bring households together and ensure the data was complete—a task performed by the Minnesota Population Center of the University Minnesota.¹⁸ In the absence of early vital registration in the United States, it served as the single most significant source for finding residents of the United States in the 19th century. In 2002, the department delivered both the 1881 British and the 1880 United States censuses online through FamilySearch Internet.

Ellis Island Project

Two years later in 2001, the name indexing program delivered its second major output, an index to the Ellis Island passenger lists. Ellis Island, located just west of Manhattan, New York, was the main point of passage for immigrants to the United States from Europe and elsewhere at the beginning of the 20th century. The passenger lists promised to open up the ancestral past of these immigrants by indicating their place of origin. In partnership with the Statue of Liberty–Ellis Island



Release of the Ellis Island Passenger Index
Courtesy American Family Immigration Center

Foundation, the National Park Service, and the Department of the Interior, the Family History Department provided the indexing software and an indexing core of Church members.¹⁹ Inasmuch as many Church members had immigrant ancestry, the index would serve them to make the research leap across the ocean.

Released on April 17, 2001, at the opening of the American Family Immigration Center, the index provided access to the names of 24 million passengers. It represented the work of 12,000 Church member volunteers donating around 5.6 million hours of work over a period of eight years.²⁰ The top 25 media markets in the United States covered the launch.²¹ Over 600 television and radio stations and over 300 print media outlets reported the event.²² The Church posted this information to FamilySearch.org much later, in 2009, and in the interim granted exclusive use of the index to the Ellis Island Foundation for the benefit of all immigrant descendants. It remains a key resource for anyone tracing the ancestry of immigrants to the United States.

Civil War Soldiers Project

A third major project of the name indexing program was the Civil War Soldiers project. The Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS), an umbrella for many genealogical societies in the United States, announced the project at the 1991 FGS conference at Fort Wayne, Indiana. A joint venture of the National Archives, the National Park Service, the Civil War Trust, and the Family History Department, the project promised to revolutionize Civil War history and research.²³

The indexing of the primary source, 6.3 million muster roll index cards, began in 1993. Thousands of volunteers from computer interest groups, patriotic societies, and genealogical societies participated.²⁴ The department contributed the software and audited the transcriptions for consistency and accuracy.²⁵ The data entry was completed in 1999. The indexes for the last two states were loaded to the Internet at the Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System site in 2004 and announced in a September celebration at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C., the site of President Lincoln's assassination.²⁶ It is also available for searching at every Civil War battleground visitor's center. With the volunteer assistance of the department and FGS, a project estimated to require 6 million dollars to complete was done for a mere quarter million.²⁷

Compact Disc Publications

The department took advantage of compact disc (CD) technology soon after it came into existence in the late 1980s to deliver FamilySearch DOS databases broadly. In April 1998, it began publishing CDs for an entirely new purpose—to support the research process by providing offline digital access to information and resources. The SourceGuide, authored by the staff of the Family History Library, delivered research guidance for specific states, countries, and record types. In comparison with printed resources, it provided at minimal cost the wealth of knowledge available at department headquarters but unevenly available elsewhere. At a news conference during April general conference in 1998, the SourceGuide was touted as a breakthrough in delivering research assistance to Church members.²⁸ The department had no means to deliver it online and chose to publish it on CD, an attractive new product. However,

the technology was not sufficiently simple to use nor ubiquitous enough to engage many members in the research process, and it sold few SourceGuides.

Later, the department published indexes to specific record collections on CD. Early in 1998, it released indexes for the British 1851 census (1.5 million records from three counties only) and Australian vital records (4.8 million records).²⁹ In October 1998, it published the British Vital Records Index followed, containing information about 4.7 million vital events from 1500 to 1888.³⁰ This was the first of the research resource files derived from extracted names for which ordinances had not been performed. Along this same vein, in early 1999 the department published five million North American names generated by the Family Records Extraction Program during the last two decades of the 20th century.³¹

In the offing were two CD collections, massive in terms of records, unprecedented then as a CD publication: the previously described British 1881 census, containing 30 million records, and the U.S. 1880 census, containing 50 million records. The department released the British 1881 census on 25 CDs in 1999.³² The publication garnered the 2000 Library Association of England Reference Award as the best electronic database of the year.³³ Two years later, the department released the U.S. 1880 census on 56 CDs. At the National Genealogical Society Conference in 2001, department representatives sold their total complement of 500 in two days. Ray Madsen, who managed the product, reported: "We had people coming up to us in tears telling they had



Compact Disc Publications Courtesy The Church

found people they could not find previously. The biggest problem is that it kept people up all night. They were ecstatic; they were thrilled.”³⁴

The department published additional vital record indexes of extracted names for Western Europe (2000), Mexico (2000), and Scandinavia (2001), as well as a second edition for Great Britain (2002). Along with these discs, it published a Mormon Immigration Index (2000) to passenger lists and other sources, the product of a pioneer sesquicentennial project done by the

department in cooperation with two professors from Ricks College (later Brigham Young University–Idaho), Fred Woods and Blaine Bake.³⁵

In 2001, the department published a compact disc index that attracted a lot of media attention—the Freedman’s Bank Records. The Freedman’s Savings and Trust Company emerged from the ashes of the Civil War as a bank for freed slaves. Though the bank eventually failed, the record of depositors was one of the few record collections specific to African-American ancestry.³⁶ In addition to names and relationships, it documented the tragic circumstances and triumphs in the lives of many former slaves.³⁷ Prior to the creation of this product, many researchers failed to mine the record collection because it was difficult to research. Marie Taylor, on the staff of the Family History Library and an African-American research enthusiast, initiated the data entry of the names and relationships into Personal Ancestral File as a personal project in 1989. She expanded the volunteer effort to prisoners in the South Point Correctional Facility of the Utah State Prison. Over a decade, 550 inmates contributed their time as a freewill offering. The department released the data on compact disc during Black History month in February 2001, with news conferences in Salt Lake City and 11 major media markets from Los Angeles to New York.³⁸ Over 500 television and radio stations carried the news. The product forged immeasurable goodwill between the department and the African-American community.³⁹ After the release, department Executive Directors and senior staff visited the inmates personally to thank them for their work.⁴⁰

In 2002, the department decided to end publishing indexes on compact disc because it concluded that it was a relatively expensive distribution model and the demand relatively low in the broad market.⁴¹ Instead, the department chose to take more advantage of the Internet to distribute indexes to the public. Concentrating its resources on the development of new FamilySearch and new digital record systems resulted in a five-year pause in delivering databases. This interim period ended in 2007, with the creation of FamilySearch beta discussed later in this chapter.

FamilySearch Internet

The Church had launched a general website in December 1996 without fanfare or official announcement. The department contributed content to the Church’s website the following January.⁴² Lacking research content, the department’s contribution attracted little attention. The situation would soon change. Monte J. Brough had a vision of applying technology to family history work. He saw the potential of the Internet and pushed for the approval to use it for delivering family history data. While the Church granted approval after the end of his term of service, he laid the foundation with senior Church leaders, developing the issues, compiling fiscal estimates, and pulling people together to take a bold step forward.⁴³ In April 1998, Church leaders authorized the department to proceed with delivering genealogical content to the Internet.⁴⁴ Within a year, it delivered FamilySearch Internet—a very fast delivery in comparison to prior product development in the department.

Consistent with the development philosophy of the time, the site was bought rather than built. In June 1998, the department selected JLM Technologies (later called Lavastorm) in Boston,

Massachusetts, to build the site and IBM to host the service. Department leaders were impressed with JLM's desire and the spirit of their presentation.⁴⁵ JLM developed the user interface application software while department staff prepared the data content in an Oracle database. The department leased the hardware, hardware servicing, and support from IBM.⁴⁶ JLM demonstrated a prototype in Salt Lake City on September 15, 1998.⁴⁷ The department set the goal to deliver a beta version in April 1999. Randy Bryson, product manager of the site, considered this hardly feasible when they decided to include the International Genealogical Index (IGI) in the first release. Extracting IGI data had never taken less than eight months. At a meeting of the three groups, IBM offered some next generation software not discussed previously; then Oracle offered a new threading scheme just developed that would accelerate processing speed. The department had developed a method to read their data directly into Oracle. Putting all three initiatives together, though unknown to each other before the meeting, the project team completely processed the entire IGI in just three weeks.⁴⁸

Department leadership pondered selecting a catchy name for the anticipated website and decided on "FamiLink" until it discovered that name had to be purchased, and the owner wanted a substantial amount of money to sell it.⁴⁹ They reverted to their long-term trade name, FamilySearch. Continued use of this name reinforced it as a brand associated with the Church's family history efforts. It would eventually become the corporate identity of the department. The site had a somewhat longer site name at first—FamilySearch Internet Genealogy Service (FIGS)—but the extra three words did not last long in common usage.⁵⁰



President Gordon B. Hinckley Launches FamilySearch Internet Courtesy Deseret News.
Photographer: Don Grayston

President Gordon B. Hinckley launched FamilySearch Internet on May 24, 1999. He commented, "I hope you understand this is far from just a new website. . . . Today we take the

long-awaited step of allowing home access via the Internet to some of the most significant materials in our Family History Library.”⁵¹ Elder Russell M. Nelson in Washington, D.C., was available to answer questions there. With the website in testing mode prior to the announcement, 50,000 users were hitting it with five million hits a day.⁵² On the inaugural day, it received more than 40 million hits.⁵³ Users continued to inundate the site and overload the system. System controllers institute a temporary system of allotting each user 15 or 30 minute intervals at peak times. Two months later, it registered 15 million hits per day.⁵⁴ By the end of the year it averaged 8.5 million hits a day, making it the most visited genealogy website in 1999.⁵⁵ Randy Bryson remembers the “outpouring of appreciation from people around the world” because “we had set the stage for a whole new world with regards to finding records.”⁵⁶



FamilySearch Internet Courtesy Family History Department

A touted feature of the site was links to other sites. The department requested that website owners register their sites. Once registered, it reviewed the site to see if the content was appropriate to include, and if so classified it by category.⁵⁷ At launch, the site linked to 3,500 other websites.⁵⁸ However, the process took too much time, it was too complicated for volunteer evaluators, and the links frequently became invalid as Internet resources changed location or disappeared.⁵⁹ The site dropped this feature in 2003.⁶⁰

The key databases on the site at launch were Ancestral File and the IGI. The site gave access to 400 million names. This number increased by 240 million names in November 1999, including names not previously ready for release when the site was launched.⁶¹ In 2001, the department added to the site the 2000 IGI addendum, previously published on CD, for a grand total of 760 million names.⁶² In September 2002, it created lineage links of IGI names based on the names of the parents when such were available. This linking created at minimum two-generation pedigree charts and grouped entries into families.⁶³ In linking IGI names, the department took another step toward its ultimate goal of creating a central lineage-linked file with ordinance data. It added additional names, databases, and features over time.

Ancestral File Online

Ancestral File fell short of the long-term vision to create a central file of lineage-linked names connected to temple ordinances.⁶⁴ In CD format, it did contain ordinance data, but this information came from member submissions and might vary from the ordinance data in the IGI. The department removed ordinance data from the online version of Ancestral File, reducing the confusion of having ordinance dates that conflicted with the IGI. The online

version of the file was never updated. With new FamilySearch in the offing, the department no longer saw it as essential to the long-range effort. Though it still received submissions in 2002 at the rate of 2,000 per year, it did not published them but held them pending the delivery of these names through new FamilySearch.⁶⁵ In February 2003, the department officially discontinued accepting submissions to the file and directed that lineage-linked name files only be submitted to the Pedigree Resource File (PRF).⁶⁶ In a historical footnote, it approved the disposal of the four-generation sheets submitted 40 years earlier by Church members to create Ancestral File.⁶⁷

Research Guidance 2000

The concept behind research guidance was to take a beginner through a standardized research process, leading him or her to the records with the desired content. Called the Research Information Center, it evolved from a concept developed by Family History Library staff and championed by staff member Wilma Adkins. The department approved it officially in 1992, eight years before it delivered an initial.⁶⁸ In 1994, the library staff demonstrated a prototype system that assisted a patron to turn a question into a description of records that would probably answer the question. Then the system provided results from the Library Catalog for the records already in the collection that patrons could research.⁶⁹ The product intended to simplify the research process, daunting to the average Church member. It took several years to generate sufficient guidance that was specific to the various countries and many record types in the world. In 1997, the product, known as Research Guidance, was demonstrated to the Quorum of the Twelve as a compact disc product.⁷⁰

With the advent of FamilySearch Internet, the product morphed into an online version and was finally released in October 2000. The department described it as a virtual research assistant for the “novice genealogist.”⁷¹ A major enhancement for FamilySearch Internet, it was later imitated later by other genealogical software vendors. Yet it lacked the key functionality of providing online access to sources. Rather than develop the product further, department leaders chose to simplify research by delivering images and indexes online and providing guidance through the Research Wiki, discussed later in this chapter. The vision of assisting the novice continues to motivate the department.

Census Indexes Online

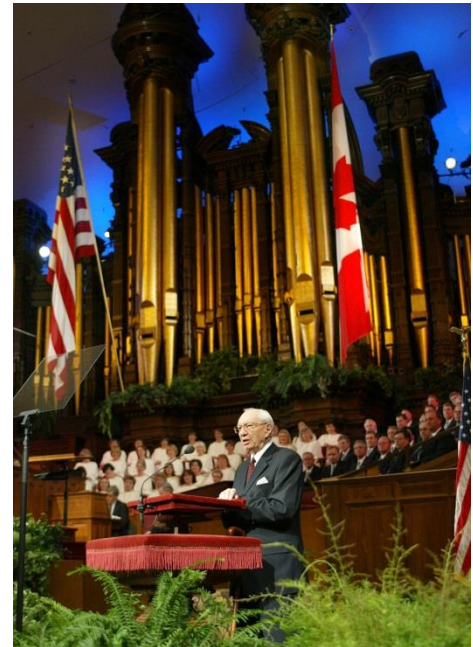
The department added indexes previously published on CD to FamilySearch Internet. It chose to make the delivery of the 1880 U.S. census, the 1881 British census, and the 1881 Canadian census (not published previously) a major media event. President Gordon B. Hinckley, who had ushered in the era of online access to genealogical content three years earlier, announced the census delivery on October 23, 2002. Twenty-seven sites in the U.S. and Canada hosted the press conference live for media representatives in those locations.⁷² In a single stroke, the department added to the site 85 million index entries of original records.⁷³ Commercial vendors and governments copied this pioneering effort, initiating massive indexing projects of other census records for online audiences. The most prominent of these commercial vendors was Ancestry. While delivering its own indexes to U.S. census records as key products, Ancestry cooperated with the department in 2003 to link to images of the 1880 census, which they had

scanned from films in the collection of the Family History Library. In return, Ancestry provided free access to the images through family history centers.⁷⁴ It was the first major instance of cooperation with another company rather than plodding the path alone, a major strategy development.

FamilySearch Internet Transforms

For several years, the department ended further development of FamilySearch Internet, since most department resources went to develop new FamilySearch. Management determined that Family Search Internet was significantly flawed. It was expensive to add new data, and by 2002, nobody on staff knew the code, making it virtually impossible to enhance the content.⁷⁵ The vendor who developed it had moved on, and the code was “brittle,” making it difficult to reprogram.

Department leadership made the decision to improve the site superficially and at minimal expense, adding new information over time until it replaced the site. Steve Anderson, a marketing manager hired in 2005, implemented the first phase of upgrading the site to make it more immediately useful and easier to discover via Internet search tools. He designed a new home page, making the key functionality visible without requiring users to click further into the site.⁷⁶ Using tools then available to track what users were doing on the site, he determined the effectiveness of each site component. Though the improvements were intentionally cosmetic, the upgrades improved the site’s ranking on search engines and delivered more effectively the content that was already there.⁷⁷ Initially, site traffic increased by 70 percent.⁷⁸ The department eventually replaced the site with FamilySearch.org that provided access to images and indexes of genealogical sources. The expertise the department gained in tuning the site to be recognized by search engines was used in delivering its replacement.⁷⁹



Census Index Press Conference Courtesy
Deseret News. Photographer: Tom Smart

Digital Camera Capture

Lagging behind the name indexing program but equally important, the department began to deliver online images. The public expectation that genealogical records would soon be delivered digitally far exceeded the capacity of a technology still in its infancy in 2000.⁸⁰ The department knew that delivering images digitally in any quantity far exceeded its resources. In 2002 the department deliberately decided to begin creating images digitally, even though it did not have the infrastructure to deliver those images to users. It hired key personnel with the required skills and incrementally developed the required systems.⁸¹ It would take the department another five years to begin to deliver images online. During this period, it began creating the images following two separate paths: digital camera capture (or the process of taking a digital image of a document for permanent data storage) and microfilm scanning, discussed later.

Prior to 2002, department staff initiated the development of a working prototype. Completed in December 1999, it controlled the camera, saved images in a TIFF format, and recorded metadata, or information about the image. Because of the nascent state of digital technology and the austere developmental environment in the department during the 1990s, funds simply were never allocated to pursue digital camera capture. Richard (Rick) Laxman, a camera specialist, started investigating the process on his own initiative in 1996. Image resolution at



Digital Camera Capture Investigation Courtesy Family History Department

the time, measured in megapixels, was extremely low for document capture, but higher resolution cameras were just around the corner. By May 1998, Laxman was able to demonstrate to department leadership a proof of concept for a digital camera capture system.⁸² Just the previous month, the department had reviewed a request from the Scottish Record Office to digitize a collection of wills.⁸³ The department blended the two projects.

Rick Laxman worked with a student at Brigham Young University (BYU) to build an application that would control the camera, save the images in TIFF format, and record metadata, or information about the image. It took the additional assistance of a BYU professor, Gene Ware, and a businessman, Craig Lindstrom, to create a working prototype. They completed the system in December 1999. That year, digital camera resolution reached 6.3 megapixels, sufficient for document capture. The department bought one of these cameras in October 1999 and shipped it to Scotland.⁸⁴ In January 2000, Rick headed to Scotland with the system to manage the camera and the images it would capture. In the meantime, Scotland brought in cameras from various vendors for testing. None of the alternate cameras captured metadata. The choice was clear, and the archive chose the department's camera for the project.⁸⁵ Following the Scottish success, the department initiated digital projects in 2002 in Quebec, Poland, Belgium, England, and Texas.⁸⁶

The transition from microfilm to digital capture required a number of adjustments. Some older camera operators, steeped in a microfilm background, never made the transition. A majority did, however, and some did it very quickly. New digital camera operators discovered that the digital camera was easier to learn how to use, and they learned it much quicker than had been the case previously for people learning to use a microfilm camera. Archives were willing to transition to digital technology. The general secretary of the International Council on Archives came to Salt Lake City to seek a donation of microfilm cameras for use in developing countries. After viewing the digital facilities, he said, "Well, maybe I've been wrong in my thinking. Maybe we ought to be encouraging these developing archives to just go directly to digital." The transition took a lead commercial vendor, Kodak, by surprise. It had to scrap a five-year

transition plan of going from film to digital products and institute an 18-month plan to keep up with competitors. By 2008, the suppliers of microfilm had virtually disappeared.⁸⁷



Digital Camera Operation Courtesy
The Church

As decided in 2002, the department transitioned steadily to digital capture to create the content for future delivery. By 2003, the department had 18 digital cameras, 37 in 2004, and 55 in 2005.⁸⁸ In 2006, the department appropriated funds to purchase 50 cameras, thereby doubling the inventory in a single year.⁸⁹ By 2007, 145 of the 216 camera projects were digital.⁹⁰ In early 2011, 84 percent of the camera inventory was digital.⁹¹

Digital camera capture generated output slowly at first, with a 2001 total of a half-million images. This output grew to 1.5 million images for 2002 and 2003 and then to four million images for 2004.⁹² Beginning in 2005, digital acquisition expanded rapidly from 15 million images that year to 57 million images acquired in 2010.⁹³

Camera resolution continued to improve. In 2010, virtually all the digital cameras were of the 11- or 16-megapixel variety, with 50-megapixel cameras just beginning to enter service.⁹⁴ The digital camera—small enough to fit in a pocket—a computer, and an external hard drive replaced the bulky film cameras and crates of films previously lugged by camera operators to all points of the globe. Training for camera operators took less time, dropping from ten days for microfilm cameras to three days or less for digital cameras.⁹⁵ At the same time, image quality improved. A great advantage of digital cameras was that the operator could see the image that had been captured and judge quality immediately, instead of waiting the weeks required by microfilm technology before receiving a negative quality report and then having to retake the images.⁹⁶

The department acronym for the original digital camera and software was DCam. It wrote the next iteration, DCam2, to accommodate newer cameras. It worked with 8-, then 11-, then 16-megapixel cameras. Olaf Zander, a department employee in Germany, wrote the code for this version of the digital camera in 2003.⁹⁷ In 2009, the department started to buy 50-megapixel cameras that could capture two pages in a single image.⁹⁸ The 2011 version of these cameras and associated software are called DCamX. The software improved the ease of calibrating the camera and, more importantly, the ease of merging image metadata with the image. This ability permitted camera operators to capture information about the image, which enabled the rapid delivery of the image to the Internet after received at headquarters in Salt Lake City. The image transfer media to get the images back to department headquarters also evolved quickly from digital linear tapes (DLT) to digital video discs (DVD) to external hard drives, which continued to be used in 2011.⁹⁹

Archival Partnerships

Agreements with archives and other record repositories preceded image capture, whether done by microfilm or digitally. From 1995 to 2011, the number of countries or territories from which records were acquired rose by 9 from 101 to 110, with the addition of Cape Verde, Czech Republic, Gruzija (Georgia), Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kazakhstan, Malta, Moldova, and Nicaragua.¹⁰⁰ Previous to this period, the department typically negotiated just to acquire images. But during this period, these negotiations shifted to a concept of account management, in which, in exchange for public access to records, the department operated as a long-term partner with record repositories to help them accomplish their purposes.¹⁰¹

After the appointment of Monte J. Brough as the Executive Director, the department reviewed all acquisition projects and placed emphasis once again on acquiring records from areas of Church ancestry.¹⁰² As a result, it concluded a project in Sri Lanka that had begun primarily to preserve deteriorating records. But for the most part, the 250 projects in progress were deemed in order.¹⁰³ In addition, the department renewed its emphasis in the United States and Canada on acquiring records of births, marriages, and deaths.¹⁰⁴ The vital records in these countries often began to be recorded and preserved in the late 19th century, and these records had not been old enough to acquire previously. In the first decade of the 21st century, the department reduced the number of camera projects from 250 to about 200.¹⁰⁵

Two big breakthroughs in developing new partnerships in the early 20th century occurred in Wales and Italy. Just after World War II, Archibald Bennett attempted but failed to acquire records of the Church of Wales. An archivist who had cooperated with the Family History Department in England became the Church of Wales archivist, opening up the records to be imaged 60 years later. He was instrumental in getting everybody to the table and “smoothed the waters” for the department negotiator. After 18 months of discussion, the two parties concluded in September 2008.¹⁰⁶

In Italy, the department acquired images of many records from a variety of different repositories during the four decades from 1972 to 2011. Still, a wealth of over a 100 million records not yet accessible existed under the jurisdiction of the Italian National Archive. The archive wanted to provide digital access to its records not only to people in Italy but to the descendants of the Italian diaspora around the world. Over a period of six years, the department worked through to a resolution in June 2011 that included free access for Church members to images through FamilySearch.org and for all other users through the archive. The agreement also included the indexing of the names in the records.¹⁰⁷ At the end of 2011, twenty-three cameras operated in Italy fulfilling the terms of the contract, with that number set to increase in 2012.

The religious doctrine behind the department’s acquisitions efforts from time to time caused some religious groups to oppose those efforts. A publicly visible instance occurred in 2008. Cooperation to acquire Catholic records faltered in a few areas when on April 5, 2008, a letter sent from the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy directed all Catholic bishops worldwide to oppose the department’s acquisition program.¹⁰⁸ Anti-U.S. sentiment also worked against

acquisition efforts.¹⁰⁹ The department was sensitive to these attitudes and, despite these setbacks, continued to work successfully with Catholic institutions and archives because of the trust built up over years of contact.¹¹⁰ More often than not, preserving the records had a positive result. In the words of Elder D. Todd Christofferson, “Family history and records gathering and preservation do engender goodwill. . . . It is true that some record custodians deny us access or resist partnering with us because they object to the possible use of information for various ordinances, but in most cases, our proffers to help have opened doors.”¹¹¹

Image Rights

Integral to the process of obtaining images was receiving the right to distribute and use those images. To achieve the widest distribution of genealogical information possible, the department always sought full rights for microfilm circulation. In the late 1980s, the department did not have precise information on what rights they had for any particular film. Rick Ebert, a director at the time, decided to create a system to specify microfilm rights. The department completed this project by March 1995. Led by Janet DiPastena, a team tracked down 30,000 agreements and tied them to microfilm numbers for 1.8 million rolls.¹¹² In 2000, the department began negotiating for unrestricted online distribution of digital images previously filmed.¹¹³ This process involved locating the people with current responsibility for the records covered by these contracts. For instance, with the dissolution of East Germany, record ownership was dispersed from a single state entity to multiple archives. The number of custodians to contact went from one to thousands, a significant amount of work for field relations representatives.¹¹⁴

Records archives and keepers of original records possess unique documents and are disposed primarily to preserve the records and only secondarily to distribute them. They are not always disposed to grant distribution rights for digital images, or they may permit distribution only to specific audiences. By the end of 2011, rights for digital usage had been obtained for approximately 69 percent of the microfilms in the department’s collection.¹¹⁵ For digital capture projects, the department sought to obtain image rights as part of the initial account negotiations for the projects. While the department desired to provide free access to images, it honored the concerns of record keepers and restricted images when restrictions are agreed to mutually.

Acquisition Missionaries

Whereas missionary work and proselytizing were synonymous during most of Church history, this association began to change in the latter part of the 20th century. The Church began calling senior couples and some older singles as missionaries to serve in a great variety of assignments, such as health service, humanitarian service, Church leadership, temple service, and government liaison, among others.¹¹⁶ In the late 1970s, the department first used senior couples in the acquisitions program.¹¹⁷ Under the supervision of department employees, older missionaries negotiated for filming, supervised filmers, did filming themselves, prepared documents for filming, and taught family history to local members and leaders. Full-time missionaries initiated the age of digital imaging by manning the cameras in the Scottish project described earlier in this chapter. In 1999, the number of acquisition missionaries in the

department stood at 80.¹¹⁸ This number did not exceed 100 for most of the next decade, though it stood at 108 by the end of 2011.¹¹⁹

Through 1997, acquisition missionaries could be recruited by headquarters units, but thereafter the Missionary Department required that missionaries be called through the normal missionary process.¹²⁰ For administrative purposes, this new arrangement put acquisition missionaries under the direction of mission presidents. Because most mission presidents did not have the time or interest to supervise acquisition work, they deferred assigning work to department personnel who supervised family history work in their area. However, full-time missionaries did rely on their mission president for personal needs and spiritual direction.¹²¹ In 2000, the Church formally gave supervisory responsibility to acquisition field managers, giving them greater flexibility to assign missionaries to where they were needed rather than being confined to specific mission boundaries.¹²² Family history staff continued to coordinate with mission presidents when moving missionaries to different assignments.¹²³

Microfilm Scanning

Concurrent with the effort to acquire images digitally, the department began scanning images previously microfilmed. As early of 1994, department leadership considered the potential of technology to unlock the department's microfilm collection and the urgency of doing it. While



Microfilms to be Scanned Courtesy The Church

microfilm was an excellent preservation medium because of its long shelf life, it was a weak distribution medium compared to digital images. Sending out microfilm took weeks if not months, whereas digital images with indexes could “revolutionize access to the Church’s microfilm collection.”¹²⁴

Herbert White, a camera operations specialist who had won national awards for his micrographics work, was a key investigator of scanning technology. Commenting on the state of scanning technology in 1999, he observed that scanners then available were designed to handle modern documents in which the text was crisp and sharp; and not yet able to handle handwritten documents with poor to low contrast, stains, and mold. With regard to scanning speed, the results were encouraging. While the hope of scanning at one image per second had been laughable five years earlier, it was being done in 1999 under optimal conditions at 60 to 100 frames per minute.¹²⁵

The department's first scanning prototype also tested the indexing of images. In 2001, the department wrote images of the Utah 1910 federal census to compact disc and sent them to a stake, where indexers extracted names of the heads of household. The demonstration prompted the allocation of funds to buy several scanners for further testing.¹²⁶

Scanning development began in earnest when the department established a facility in Utah Valley to work on digital prototypes for imaging and indexing. Microfilm scanning became part of the effort to create the Research Subsystem. The department appointed Dallan Quass, a volunteer of independent means, during the fall of 2002 as a consultant for the Unified System. Jay Verkler eventually put him in charge of the Research Subsystem.¹²⁷ Quass and Verkler resolved in November 2003 to establish an office in Utah Valley. This office sought to create prototypes that assisted researchers to find and view genealogical sources. It expected to scale these prototypes incrementally into production systems. They sent digital scanning out the door as the first prototype to make it into production.

In the early 21st century, an operator doing quality scanning undertook a mind-numbing arduous process of watching images flow across a computer screen, capturing them digitally one at a time while trying to pick out poor images, stopping the process to recalibrate, and then restarting the process. The department calculated that it would take over a century for 20 scanners operating at the scanning rate available in 2003 to digitize films at the Granite Mountain Records Vault, clearly an unacceptable amount of time.¹²⁸

Besides the slow rate of scanning, the process presented two major quality challenges: 1) skipping images, and 2) ensuring the right amount of exposure when the density on a single film might vary significantly.¹²⁹ Heath Nielson, newly hired in 2003, brought with him the concept of ribbon scanning.



The hope was to increase the scanning rate by automating much of the process and leaving manual intervention only to making judgment calls on problem

Automated Film Digitization Courtesy The Church

images.¹³⁰ Instead of creating individual images, the scanner created a single image of the entire microfilm roll, called a ribbon. The software identified and framed each individual image. A human auditor could then review the results to ensure quality and correct framing. Once accepted, the software cut the broad image into individual images that could then be stored and distributed. This process transferred much of the monotonous work from the operator to the computer.¹³¹ It increased the scanning rate over tenfold, reducing the rate of scanning a single roll to just a few minutes.¹³²

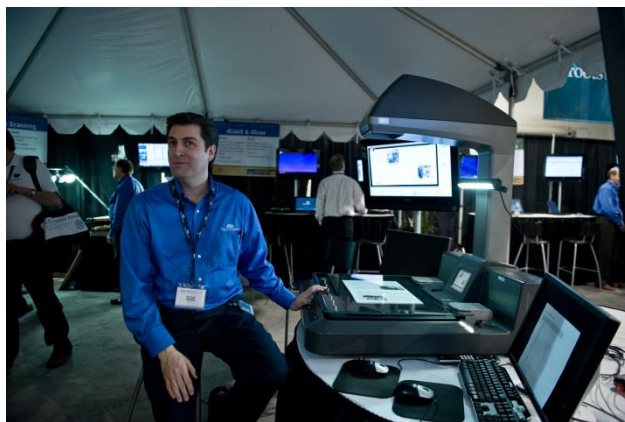
The effort to develop ribbon scanning lasted from 2003 to 2005. It was a step into the unknown on the leading edge of technology. While working on the project, Heath Nielson remembered, “There were some times when it looked pretty dark. It didn’t look like we were going to get things working. It was amazing the amount of problems that arose, almost more than you would expect. . . . My health actually suffered because for a time I was putting in 12-hour days

and just working [like] crazy, just doing whatever I could to get this thing working, because I was bound and determined to make it happen.”¹³³

Scanning rapidly increased the store of images to be delivered online. The numbers of scanned images rose steadily from 7 million in 2001 to 69 million in 2009.¹³⁴ As software and process improvements went into effect, the totals rose dramatically: 151 million in 2010 and 248 million in 2011. The number of scanners grew from three in 2001 to fourteen by 2007, augmented by nine more in February 2011, greatly expanding the potential to convert vault images to digital format at an unprecedented rate.¹³⁵ The new process cut into the mountain of images at such a rapid rate that the department estimated at the end of 2011 it would complete the task of digitizing films at the Granite Mountain Records Vault in the next seven to eight years.¹³⁶ Microfilm scanning became part of the effort to create the Research Subsystem as discussed later.

Digitizing Books

While the department focused most of its digital imaging resources on original records, an employee-generated initiative inaugurated the process of digitizing books. The process began in 2001 when David Rencher, director of the Family History Library, contacted Brigham Young University (BYU) about digitizing non-copyrighted family histories.¹³⁷ BYU had been discussing a digital venture with iArchives, a Utah computer start-up. BYU provided the server, the library scanned the books, and iArchives processed the images. BYU matched funding provided to iArchives by Angel Partners, a Utah nonprofit organization funded by Ray Noorda, made famous previously as CEO of Novell, from 1982 to 1994.¹³⁸ The initial funding resulted in the scanning of 4,699 family histories by early 2006.¹³⁹ The donated funding assisted the department to create content for future delivery through FamilySearch.org. When the outside funding



Book Scanning Demonstration at RootsTech Courtesy
Brandon Flint

ended, the department continued to scan and process book images.¹⁴⁰ Jeri Jump managed the implementation of Kofax software, which prepared and described the images for delivery to the Internet.¹⁴¹ In August 2007, the department delivered the product publicly through the BYU Harold B. Lee Library server as the BYU Family History Archives.¹⁴²

An inexpensive project, it soon expanded to other libraries around the United States. The department kept project costs low with the assistance of missionary and community volunteers doing the scanning. An OCR

(optical character recognition) program indexed the text automatically, a minimal expense in comparison to manual indexing. Other libraries with genealogical collections soon accepted the invitation to join the effort. In 2007, the Allen County Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana, entered the project, scanning local histories and directories, and the Joseph F. Smith Library at BYU–Hawaii joined, scanning oral histories that had been transcribed.

In 2008, the Clayton Library of the Houston Public Library system and the Mid-Continent Public Library Midwest Genealogy Center in Independence, Missouri, became partners in the consortium, adding the regional strengths of their books to the virtual collection.¹⁴³ By 2011, the system used to deliver the images had reached capacity at just under 18,000 books. While these images were being transferred to a new system during the year, nearly 13,000 new books were scanned and ready to load in early 2012. A total of just over 30,000 books had been published by the end of January 2012.¹⁴⁴ With new books being added at the rate of nearly 3,000 books per month, the department projected this collection to double in a single year. In 2012, the department integrated the collection into FamilySearch.org as “Books” option under the “Search” tab.

FamilySearch Indexing

In 2005, the department greatly expanded the name indexing efforts described previously by delivering images and index templates online. Extracting data from offline images in earlier efforts required a huge manual effort. Staff and missionaries at Church headquarters burned images from a single microfilm onto several compact discs and mailed them out. On the receiving end, stake extraction directors would break down a batch further and travel to each home to copy the images to an indexer’s computer and then return to pick up the index data of a completed batch. Then the directors would have to return the data to headquarters. That piece of the process was improved in 2001, as stake directors began to email indexing data back to headquarters. Still, most of the process remained manual, spurring the development of indexing over the Internet.¹⁴⁵



FamilySearch Indexing Courtesy The Church

Online indexing revolutionized the process. Though the requirements were written in 2001, the system did not get support until 2003, when Stephen Valentine became the manager of indexing, with a new management team reaching up to Jay Verkler, who gave the project a green light.¹⁴⁶ While the department built the main systems, it always looked for available products to purchase as components of those systems.¹⁴⁷ IArchives won the competition to develop the product.¹⁴⁸ The department presented the alpha version to two stakes and two genealogical societies in 2004.¹⁴⁹ The program debuted in 2005, with 80 stakes participating.¹⁵⁰ When the department announced the program to the genealogical community at the National Genealogical Society Conference, 450 excited attendees registered as volunteer indexers.¹⁵¹ In 2005, indexers completed the first large project—a project to index statewide death records from Georgia.¹⁵²

FamilySearch Indexing (FSI) had a profound impact. It exponentially speeded up the indexing process. Whereas it took 17 years in the period before 2000 to extract the 50 million names in the 1880 U. S. census, it took only 11 months during 2006 and 2007 to extract the 1900 U. S. census,

with 76 million names.¹⁵³ Among other things, FSI eliminated the need for stake extraction directors to visit homes.¹⁵⁴ The director of the Pocatello Idaho Stake stated, “Now we spend our time extracting instead of doing all the stake director stuff.”¹⁵⁵ A stake extraction director, who might have before spent 40 hours a week driving around and doing other administrative tasks, could in 10 hours get more done than ever before.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, old extraction methods were continued temporarily to serve those who preferred the old system.¹⁵⁷ To assist the stake extraction directors learn the new processes, the department updated the *Family Record Extraction Handbook*, published in 1994, with a 2007 edition.¹⁵⁸ FSI also automatically linked index entries to images, greatly facilitating the delivery to the public of the indexed images.

The department heavily promoted the transition to the new system and took steps to shut down the old system. It temporarily sidelined foreign-language extraction because the purchased software upon which it was built had not been internationalized. Getting the new system into the market was deemed of highest import, with internationalization to follow later.¹⁵⁹ At the time of the transition, a core of German indexers existed who had been extracting data in the old way for decades, as well as a core of Spanish indexers, established more recently, all using the old system. They were all asked to convert to United States extraction and give up the old methods. Some of the German indexers did not have a computer or the Internet and were on a fixed income. They simply walked away from the program, and years of experience were lost. Some of the Spanish extractors got used to doing easy records from the United States and hesitated to return to the harder Spanish extraction when projects in that language came up in the new system.¹⁶⁰

The department earnestly began recruiting indexers with foreign language expertise again in 2007. It called for 10,000 volunteers to index the 1930 Mexico census and other Spanish-language projects.¹⁶¹ Church leaders in Mexico created a youth program called “Indexing-mania” that recruited 2,000 volunteers and indexed over 1.5 million records in five months.¹⁶² The department delivered the 1930 Mexico census online in May 2011.¹⁶³ To continue the foreign language initiative, the department posted many language resources, such as handwriting helps for Latin, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Italian, German, and Dutch, to the indexing site in early 2009.¹⁶⁴ By March 2009, the application interface had been translated into French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.¹⁶⁵

With online indexing, many people could contribute, even those who otherwise had little opportunity to do so. Fred Manos helped extract the 1900 U. S. census. Of his contribution, Stephen Valentine recalled: “He was diagnosed with terminal cancer, and he continued extracting records right up to the very end. In fact, it was three days before he passed away; he was in his hospital room with a laptop, still extracting records. This good brother, by the end of the project, had extracted more than 200,000 names, [by] himself, on this project.”¹⁶⁶ As Fred Manos demonstrated, online indexing could be done virtually anywhere. Another contributor, Dan Bradford, indexed records during his free time while serving as a defense contractor in Iraq. He found it easy, relaxing, and satisfying.¹⁶⁷

Based on the statistic that the number of productive indexers was far fewer than those who were registered, the department began to seek more information about the indexers and to develop means to honor them with recognition and rewards.¹⁶⁸ In May 2010, it also began to send a monthly email newsletter to all indexers to establish goals, provide advice, and recognize achievements.

The department obtained remarkable results. In 2010, FamilySearch indexers could choose from over a 100 projects in 11 languages. During the year, a total of 127,000 active volunteers indexed 186 million names.¹⁶⁹ For the five years from 2006 to 2010, FSI produced 542 million names.¹⁷⁰ FSI had begun to fulfill its vision to “create a worldwide community of volunteer indexers, creating the largest database [in the world] of free indexes linked to digital images.”¹⁷¹

Name indexing, whether manually or online, strengthened some Church members in their faith. One couple who had not attended church for many years was asked by a friend and neighbor to extract records in Spanish. After doing so for a year, they went to their friend and asked what this work was used for, indicating that they had a very special feeling when they did it. They were told that the Church used the information to provide the blessings of temple sealings to those who had not had the opportunity for such ordinances during their lifetimes. The husband then looked thoughtfully at his wife and finally said to her, “Do you think it is time we prepared ourselves to also receive those blessings?” A year later, they were sealed in the temple.”¹⁷²

Offshore Indexing

Along with the overwhelming success of FamilySearch indexing, the department pursued other means to index records when Church resources were insufficient or the language and complexity of the records exceeded the skills of volunteers.¹⁷³ The two purposes for this initiative were 1) to know how commercial indexers operated, to understand how they achieved quality output, and to ensure that this level of quality was achieved or surpassed by the volunteer effort, and 2) to get occasional projects done quickly when speed was important or language skills would have been difficult to find in a volunteer environment.¹⁷⁴

The department outsourced the first index in 2004.¹⁷⁵ The Argentina 1895 census, with approximately a half million images, was indexed offshore in 2005.¹⁷⁶ The primary records indexed offshore from 2008 to 2009 were Canadian and German censuses. From September 2009 to December 2010, offshore vendors indexed 11.5 million Hungarian baptism entries.¹⁷⁷

Library Catalog

Before FamilySearch.org delivered images and indexed data, the library catalog served as the principal access to the department’s vast collection. It continued to serve in parallel with the newer systems to give access to books and records not yet digitized. Developed in-house in the late 1970s, the first computerized catalog needed a serious upgrade in the 1990s to take advantage of new technologies and deliver the catalog digitally outside the library.¹⁷⁸ Given the lack of funding for systems development in 1996, the department opted to purchase a cataloging system known as OLIB WorldView, offered by Fretwell-Downing Informatics of

Sheffield, England.¹⁷⁹ Fretwell-Downing Informatics customized the product for the unique requirements of describing family history documents, whereas most other catalog vendors dealt primarily with books and other published media. Significantly, this system permitted online delivery of cataloging information, making the information widely available to patrons before they visited the library.

The department included the catalog in the first version of FamilySearch Internet.¹⁸⁰ The catalog had previously been released on compact disc as part of FamilySearch DOS, but it was not widely available to the public. The department published it for public purchase in May 2000. While anyone could buy the compact disc for \$5, the department sent it freely to all family history centers in the United States and Canada.¹⁸¹ It published the second and last public compact disc version of the catalog in 2002.¹⁸² Publication ended because the Internet access had improved for most of the Church and the concurrently available online version could be updated much more frequently than any offline CD version.

Because of the character scripts used in Asian languages, the department developed this portion of the catalog separately. It published a compact disc version of the Chinese catalog in 1996 and distributed it to family history centers throughout Asia and the Pacific region.¹⁸³ It delivered the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean portions of the catalog through FamilySearch Internet in December 2002.¹⁸⁴

The department improved the functionality of the Internet catalog over time. In 2002, the department corrected the display of diacritics in foreign languages (something still missing from some major online catalogs).¹⁸⁵ In 2003, it added keyword search, permitting not only the title but subjects and selected notes to be searched at the same time.¹⁸⁶ When the BYU Family History Archives became available online in 2006, the catalog was linked to the imaged versions of books available there. In 2010, OLIB was enhanced to import descriptive metadata created by the camera operators that arrived with digital images, created by camera operators, greatly speeding up the cataloging process.¹⁸⁷ In 2011, the department delivered a new version of the catalog on FamilySearch.org. It continued to be a key resource to unlock access to genealogical records along with the digital images of records as they became available.

Research Subsystem or Digital Pipeline

The department eventually merged these name indexing and image capture programs into the Research Subsystem component of the Unified System. Whereas the department readily assisted those who came to the Family History Library, it did readily serve those who never crossed the library threshold or the threshold of a family history center for that matter.¹⁸⁸ The department desired to augment the work of genealogical enthusiasts, a minority in the Church, with the untapped resource of Church members who engaged in little or no genealogical activity.

The new department leadership questioned old processes, including the traditional research paradigm as the means to find sufficient new names for temple ordinances. Though some older hires welcomed innovation, others desired to adopt new techniques when proven productive.

These employees were seen by the new leadership as adherents to the idea that Church members had to become researchers. In order to serve the ordinary member who often had little appetite for research, newer personnel were encouraged to develop systems without considering the genealogical expertise of their longer term associates. The overall concept was to tap into the great majority of Church members who engaged in little or no genealogical activity.

New hires were brought in with skills such as product design, user interfaces, process automation, and business operations. Many of these new hires had little or no genealogical background. Some avoided learning those skills as something that might taint their judgment. Regardless of genealogical skill, the new hires and selected older hires were expected to provide a fresh look at family history processes.¹⁸⁹ The upside of this circumstance was that they could design something that did not replicate previous thinking. The downside was that users endured mistakes that could have been avoided if genealogical expertise had been considered up front.¹⁹⁰

A team of new and old staff set out to tackle the research conundrum with a new technological approach. Efforts to simplify the research process by reducing the time and effort to retrieve records came under the umbrella of the Research Subsystem. Dallan Quass directed the effort. Jay Verkler regarded him as a “source of clear architectural and technical thought” in the world of search technology.¹⁹¹ Quass’s initial problem was to develop and retain a workforce. The Common Pedigree, the highest priority component of the Unified System, absorbed computer engineers hired to work on the research infrastructure.¹⁹²

Developer staff referred to the tendency of the Common Pedigree to absorb staff as the “giant sucking sound.”¹⁹³ Quass had a deep feeling that the department was neglecting the records with their bounty of names for researchers to find and the research infrastructure to unlock those records.¹⁹⁴ In November 2003, he pursued the task of inaugurating the Utah Valley office where he could more readily retain his staff. The department rented facilities in American Fork and later in Orem, where it continued to operate at the end of 2011. Quass hired staff and began to build the Research Subsystem, internally known as Touchstone (which is a way to judge excellence) and later renamed the Digital Pipeline. The creation of an offsite office curbed staff loss to the Common Pedigree and provided an independent developmental environment.¹⁹⁵ Originally a long list of possible prototypes, the initial effort eventually boiled down to four major efforts: to assist members in finding ancestors through records in a much simpler way than previously, to scan microfilm (discussed above), to use the Internet to index original records (also discussed above), and to use the Internet to deliver indexes and images.¹⁹⁶

In 2004, the department funded the Research Subsystem at a lesser level than the Common Pedigree. As an outside observer at the time, Russell Stay commented to Jay Verkler, “I don’t understand the extreme focus on a conclusion repository, such as a Common Pedigree. It seems to me you’ve sort of got the cart before the horse. You ought to be focusing more on the raw information and making it available before you worry about where you’re going to put the conclusions that ought to be coming from the information.” Verkler later asked Stay to “take a

look at that and see what you can come up with.”¹⁹⁷ Stay came out of early retirement in May 2006, accepted employment to accomplish this assignment, and continued to work on it with great success for five years.¹⁹⁸

Along with the creation of a system, department staff investigated how to reduce the research burden. In a developmental effort known internally as the Research Model for the Ordinary Member (RMOM), the work group looked at options to help non-experts use genealogical records by providing an intuitive and simple research experience.¹⁹⁹ At the conceptual level, it postulated that beginners rely on compiled sources created by a genealogical marketplace developed by the department in cooperation with many other institutions.²⁰⁰ It reflected an important paradigm shift from the Family History Department doing all the work to the department sharing its resources with genealogical enthusiasts regardless of Church affiliation.

The concept was that Church members could rely on research done by others. The department therefore took steps to foster this worldwide genealogical community. Concurrently, an associated prototype called Research Strategies and Searching (RSS) used computer technology to take beginners from their research questions to the source that answered that question. The system only made it to a prototype, tested in Kansas City early in 2005. The prototype demonstrated that a step-by-step approach to research was too constraining after the initial experience, and the steps soon became barriers as the user’s research skills increased.²⁰¹ The prototype also underscored the importance of having abundant online content, such as images and indexes, for the system to be useful.²⁰² Consequently, further development was delayed until the online content became abundant by means of the Digital Pipeline.

Community Trees and Oral Histories

Along with the Orem office, another team developed research prototypes. In early 2011, an online pilot program called Community Trees demonstrated the concept of creating lineage-linked data automatically from data in genealogical sources. The Historical Family Reconstitution unit located in Salt Lake City created it with off-the-shelf software. The department delivered it through FamilySearch Labs, a public portal for prototypes.²⁰³ This work group compiled and displayed lineage-linked genealogies associated with various communities according to particular time periods. In one instance, for example, the Community Trees team gathered information from some Norwegian clerical districts. The team merged data from a published book of family lineages with data from unpublished sources, censuses, and church records to link the genealogies of families that lived in those districts.

In addition to this component, the Community Trees team offered other resources. One was to deliver online individually submitted lineage-linked files in which the integrity of submission was preserved, overcoming a major deficiency of Ancestral File. It provided access to these files not only by the collection name but by a personal name search of all files. Still of limited scope in 2010, it contained over four million names in 65 databases, such as Greek lineages from Utah, Jewish lineages from England, and medieval families from Europe.²⁰⁴

Later, the Reconstruction Team delivered oral histories on the Community Trees site. These consisted not only of paper transcripts of oral histories but also audio files, something not delivered by any other department system. Department efforts to acquire genealogical data from societies in which memory is preserved orally had been hindered by the expense and time involved in gathering the data. The department first conducted oral history projects in the South Pacific and Southeast Asia during the 1970s.²⁰⁵ In 2004, some audio tapes from these projects showed significant age-related degradation. The department assigned Spencer Wood, who had developed significant audio skills outside of his employment in the department, the task to digitize the tapes. He created 1,111 mp3 files, compressed them to reduce file size and cost, and burned them to archival-quality compact discs.²⁰⁶

Recognizing the need to continue acquiring records from societies that rely on oral history, in 2003 and 2004 the department started new oral history projects in Ghana and Nigeria.²⁰⁷ Oral histories may consist not only of an audio or video recording of the interview but also a verbatim transcript and a pedigree created from the information. Whereas these different kinds of files have always been difficult to store and to access in a single place, with the introduction of Community Trees, one could listen to an oral recitation of someone speaking 40 years earlier, read the transcript, and see the resulting pedigree.

Digital Pipeline

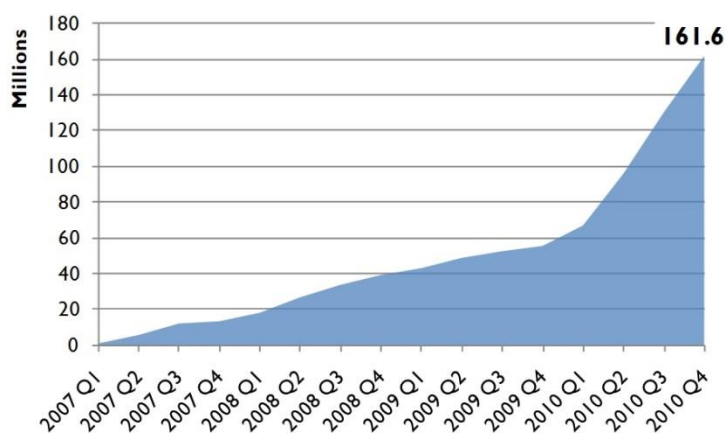
The department eventually named the system resulting from the Research Subsystem effort as the Digital Pipeline (or simply Pipeline). The name was a visual metaphor for taking the images and indexes created by the department and delivering them for publication on the Internet. In accordance with the strategy of creating content before there was a delivery system, Pipeline development lagged behind digital camera capture and scanning by several years. The images from cameras came flooding into headquarters. Staff audited the raw images for quality then stored on various DVDs and then hard drives to await processing to receive a digital identification number and then be delivered for indexing or viewing on the Internet. In 2003, the department began building a prototype called the Digital Processing Center (DPC). It had a limited capacity, inadequate to deal with a large backlog of images. The department stored them on hard drives in what the staff referred to as the “black hole”.²⁰⁸ In 2010, a new system called DPC2 replaced DPC, enormously increasing the department’s image-processing capacity.²⁰⁹

Whereas films had received GS (Genealogical Society) numbers, folders of digital images received DGS (Digital Genealogical Society) numbers.²¹⁰ The department later enhanced the system by introducing an image identifier known as the APID (Artifact Persistent Identifier), which allowed any image to be identified for reference or citation purposes.²¹¹ With the number mechanism in place, control could be exercised over the images for preservation and distribution. Cameras generated TIFF images, which had large file sizes but provided a high quality rendering of the original document. For distribution over the Internet, the TIFF file was converted to a JPEG image, about seven to eight percent of the size of a TIFF file. For preservation, the original TIFF image was converted to a lossless JPEG 2000 format, which

offered a smaller file size without degrading image quality. The resulting file was written to two storage media to be preserved in the Granite Mountain Records Vault.

Before the development of the Pipeline, components had been created independently and, according to Russell Stay existed as “a rag-tag, Band-Aided together thing.”²¹² From 2005 to 2006, the department appropriated substantial funds to purchase equipment and core software for the Pipeline infrastructure.²¹³ In October 2005, it purchased the business process management software to manage the Pipeline, dubbing it RosettaStone in reference to the stone whose inscriptions unlocked Egyptian hieroglyphics.²¹⁴ Extensive programming turned the basic functionality of the software into a system that managed the various components, such as indexes, browse hierarchies, and images of digital collections, defined by a specification document called a traveler. Travelers identified the rolls or images to be included in a collection, the fields to be indexed, and the text used for browsing images not yet indexed.²¹⁵ Various teams implemented these instructions to create online collections for patron access. Given the massive scope of the effort, developers worked only on essential components in an initiative called the “thin thread,” as an effort to align all the software and processes to create an initial output that would be just a trickle of what eventually would flow through the Pipeline.²¹⁶ It was the first delivery in the incremental process of creating a robust system over time. As this process matured, the department expanded the engineering staff to develop the Pipeline from 20 to 70 persons.²¹⁷

The initial delivery of images, indexes, and a system providing an online research experience over the Internet scheduled for 2006 was known as the “2006 deliverable.”²¹⁸ Reflecting the international heritage of Church members, the system contained records from the British Isles, Europe, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, as well as the United States. Only a half-year late, the department delivered publicly the first output from the Pipeline on June 28, 2007. The department termed this output “Record Search” and later just “Search”. Though it had developed independently from new FamilySearch, the department released it in the same week, with the result that two large, culminating software releases representing five years of labor were birthed virtually as twins.²¹⁹ By the end of 2007, the site contained 13.2 million images and 235 million indexed records for the United States, England, Canada, Mexico, and Argentina.²²⁰ The following year, the Pipeline released 21 million new images and 253 million new index records.²²¹



Digital Images Published Courtesy Family History Department

In 2008–2009, the department allocated funds to begin developing Digital Pipeline 2.0 from the “thin thread” to handle major increases in the number of users and the volume of data that could flow to the Internet.²²² The site began to capture the general public attention with the release of the name index to 1900 U.S. census in 2009, the first time this census could be freely searched and viewed by anyone.²²³ This release was part of the 18 million images and 180 million index records delivered that year.²²⁴ In 2009, the Pipeline transitioned from the “thin thread” to a new production-oriented environment, preparing for explosive growth in 2010.²²⁵ In a dramatic leap forward, the department published 89 million images and 214 million records in 2010.²²⁶ In 2011, it published 298 million images to add to the 168 million images produced in the previous four years.²²⁷ The total output for the Pipeline by the end of 2011, after four years, was 485 million images and 2.7 billion names from 1,116 collections from over 70 countries.²²⁸ The Pipeline had begun to gush.



Installing Servers for the Digital Pipeline Courtesy
Family History Department

Initially, Record Search, the public face of the Pipeline, was located on the test website known as FamilySearch Labs. On December 14, 2010, the department transferred to the FamilySearch beta site under the Records tab and called the Historical Record Collections.²²⁹ By that date, this component had delivered images and indexes for 38 countries, with new publications occurring weekly as information flowed through the Pipeline.²³⁰ Many images not yet indexed could be browsed. This browsing capability provided quicker access

than ordering microfilms and then having to use the films only during the operational hours of a family history center. At the same time, FamilySearch beta radically changed the patron view of FamilySearch.org. After a decade of limited development, the department revamped FamilySearch Internet as FamilySearch.org with the Pipeline products added under the “Search” tab. The department continued to add products to the website with the crown jewel being the transfer of new FamilySearch to become Family Tree of FamilySearch.org in November 2012.

The impact of delivering original records and indexes on the Internet on such a massive scale equals or even exceeds the impact of any other milestone in the history of the department. Feedback from users highlights the significance of this development. A 30-year search for the death certification of an ancestor named Elizabeth in Texas concluded for one patron when she found the record on the Internet. The patron reported happily, “Yesterday, I found it in Record Search under the name ‘Lizzie!’ Thank you so much for making this available.” Finding an ancestor after a 10-year search, another user reported, “Happily, I found [the record] this morning around 2:00 a.m. Wow! Tears filled my eyes. . . . By 6:00 a.m., I had located another 120 family members. Thanks so very much, everyone.” Another wrote, “There is a whole different feeling in finding your family history when you have been adopted and have never had a real family connection your entire life. Thank you for giving me light in a once dark area of my

soul.” One person searching foreign ancestry wrote, “I have found my beloved Czech ancestors. I am in tears. . . . God bless every single person instrumental in this miracle.” Summarizing the overall impact of the site, a user wrote, “To have this at my fingertips allowed me to solve almost every mystery in my tree. . . . I have accomplished more in the last few months than in all 30 years. Thank you so much.”²³¹

Digital Preservation

Equally important to digital image creation is image preservation. Rock or metallic recording objects last for thousands of years, paper can last for many hundreds of years, microfilm lasts for at least a hundred years, and digital records last for decades or less. One of the major problems with using digital images is finding or creating reading devices that are as persistent as the human eye. The Domesday project in England demonstrated this principle. Digital images published on laserdiscs in 1986 could not be read in 2002, except with specially created emulation routines. The department knew that digital preservation was a key factor to ensure that the great expense invested in the collection did not disappear because of image loss or degradation and to fulfill the archival expectation that images and data be available in the long term. Conceptually, the solution had to overcome the unstable nature of digital media and the rapid development of technology by which file formats and computer systems rapidly became obsolete.

As the department considered the digital preservation issue in 2003, it adopted a core strategy that offered a solution. Since digital media allowed for perfect copies, the problem hinged on ensuring the longevity of the information stored in computer bits rather than the physical media on which it resided at any particular time. The department has two major concerns. The size of the department’s anticipated storage requirement far exceeded the size used for other preservation efforts. Second, the solution had to be affordable, something not possible at that date. The departments hoped to achieve its vision by using low-cost media, low-cost storage technology, reliable and redundant software, and automation, where robots managed the assets and humans managed the robots.²³²

The department began working on digital preservation issues in 2006, with the investigation of digital tape libraries as a preservation technique. James Sjogren, a key hire in 2006, joined the infrastructure team, bringing in a wealth of experience with storage technology, including automated tape libraries. Implementation progressed slowly as the department learned what not to do. For instance, one day the data center where tapes were housed reached 160 degrees Fahrenheit when the air conditioning shut down. No data was lost because of back-up files, but the event underscored the need to separate low-heat tape libraries from high-heat computer servers.²³³

Design of facilities to house the tape libraries began in late 2007. In 2008–2009, the department consulted some of the best fire safety and security experts in the United States, who assisted with the design. In 2009–2010, the department began to look seriously at collaboration with other companies. One leading company was Tessella that had developed a system for the National Archives of the United Kingdom. After lengthy discussion, Tessella and FamilySearch

created an agreement and relationship that would allow FamilySearch to build large-scale systems using a preservation platform that Tessella would maintain and develop in the industry. In 2010, the department embarked on facilities site selection, design, and architecture for two preservation archives, one “active” and the other “deep,” providing back-up for the first. By 2011, two transitional tape libraries were in operation, storing four petabytes (four million gigabytes) of digital preservation records and images. The department approved the construction of two permanent facilities.²³⁴ It was a unique solution in a world in which digital preservation was in its infancy.

Digital preservation is the key to the long-term use of the content created by the many products and services detailed in this chapter. Even in its transitional state, the system preserved more data than any other digital preservation system on the planet.²³⁵ It signaled the arrival to port of a maiden voyage into the digital future inaugurated at the department’s second century of service. The amalgamation of the Digital Pipeline and Family Tree into a single system, occurring in 2011, created a new reality in pursuing our ancestral heritage.

¹In 1994, the department retired the computer that had handled the extraction program since 1978, a program known as Volunteer Data Entry (VDE). Up to 1994, data from extraction cards had been entered at VDE centers, creating a DataMark computer tape output for mailing to Church headquarters. In 1994, VDE centers were closed.

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Chapter 3: Member and Genealogical Community Support

Assisted by new technology during 1995–2011, the Family History Department evolved from supporting members and the genealogical community primarily in English from Salt Lake City to supporting them in multiple languages from locations throughout the world. Family history centers penetrated all corners of the Church. Volunteers located primarily at home, connected by an advanced communications network, answered the questions of Church members and others from the genealogical community in their own languages. The Research Wiki and online classes emerged to provide detailed information on genealogical sources and methodology. The venerable Family History Library and FamilySearch Center authored ancestral compilations to honor selected dignitaries and continued to serve people who chose to come to Salt Lake City to do family history research.

The department also developed a support network designed specifically to assist Church members. It influenced the organization of local Church genealogical callings through the *Church Handbook of Instructions*, provided information directly to ward family history consultants, and authored family history lessons for local Church units. General Authorities explained the genealogical mission of Church members and encouraged them to fulfill it. The department involved missionaries and community volunteers to move the work forward while employee staffing levels remained level, except for the engineering staff hired to create new computer systems. Missionaries around the world became integral to accomplishing department-directed family history work. Headquarters staff exported their expertise in ways not possible in the pre-Internet world. The department aligned its organizational structure and trained its staff to enter the digital age. In summary, the department extended its reach internationally, expanded the languages in which it served, and remolded its staff to serve genealogists wherever they lived.

Member Support Challenge

The challenge of engaging Church members in family history work long stymied those directing the work. In the routine of everyday life, it takes an effort to find time for family history activities. The department's leaders asked themselves in 1996, "Is the message getting out?" They concluded that very little information reached the "end of the row." The Church reached its members through its magazines and the *Church News*, a weekly periodical published as part of the *Deseret News*. Family history classes taught in the Church Educational System reached a small number of other Church members. Otherwise, the department depended on priesthood and auxiliary leaders to encourage Church members at stake conferences and in other meetings.¹ In 1999, department leadership reviewed all the studies investigating family history in the Church and concluded that Church members participate most actively in family history when local priesthood leaders teach it as an integral part of the mission of the Church to perfect the Saints, when they emphasize and promote it, and when it is taught and reinforced in families.² Hence, departmental support was only effective when local leaders took charge.

Delivering the message was complicated by the nature of the task. Based on responses to a survey of adult members conducted by the Research Information Division of the Church in 2002, 52 percent of the respondents were not sure how to do research, 29 percent felt it difficult to do, 51 percent felt that the easy research had been done, leaving only the difficult research, and 46 percent felt they lacked time to do it.³ Clearly, the department could not rely on research alone to engage a broad spectrum of Church members in finding names for temple worship. Another study focused on why pockets of Church members did succeed in submitting names. In a report generated in August 2000, the Research Information Division concluded: "Members are more likely to participate when they value temple and family history work, develop the necessary skills, and have time and opportunities to take family names to the temple."⁴

As daunting as the task to engage Church members in areas with a long-term Church presence, more so it seemed to involve Church members worldwide. At the end of 1999, 51 percent of the members lived outside the United States and Canada. The linguistic and cultural diversity of Church membership was increasing as well as the proportion of members living in less-developed countries. Educational opportunities for many of these people were limited, and literacy levels were often low, diminishing the ability of members to manage complex tools and complicated procedures. Some cultures traced lineages by descent rather than ascent, following only the male or female lineage rather than both, and had no written records to verify lineages. Family history products were not often translated into other languages. For example, the department published the *Mexico Research Outline* in English, which was of little help to Mexicans. Members worldwide often lacked access to records, training materials, forms, and software applications. They lacked access to new technologies and the physical facilities, hardware, and expertise to operate family history centers.⁵ Hence, the department faced difficult challenges in serving the entire Church.

Family History Centers

Beginning in 1963, the department created family history centers (hereafter centers) as a means to circulate worldwide microfilms from its collection. These centers increased the availability of genealogical records that previously could be researched only at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City or at a record repository. From 1995 to 2011, centers continued to serve a vital role of circulating microfilms and directing family history work locally. Later in the period, they also became a point of access for online information, particularly where many Church members did not yet have an Internet connection. At the end of 1994, there were 2,278 centers in the Family History Library System.⁶ Elder Monte J. Brough received reports that many centers were not being used. Consequently, the criteria for establishing centers became more restrictive, especially in North America, where genealogical expertise was more widespread.⁷

Department headquarters funded equipment for centers. In 2000, it appropriated money to purchase new microform reader printers and replace old ones.⁸ The department discovered through a survey that year that about 40 percent of the centers received no local funds from Church leaders. It took measures to inform directors about how to request funds as permitted by policy.⁹ Also, it created the option of establishing centers with computer resources only,

without a microfilm-circulation function. The intent was to distribute computer resources to places where none existed and add the circulation function as needed.¹⁰

During 2002 and 2003, the department leadership considered and clarified a vision for the changing role of centers in the transition to a digital environment and began to act on it.¹¹ Beginning in 2004, the emphasis on approving centers focused on areas with less access to technology and the Internet. This department intended this emphasis to provide the needed technology for future access to new FamilySearch and digital images delivered only over the Internet.¹² The department sought to approve centers within easy travel distance to every temple and to have them open during the same hours as the temple.¹³ In 2008, it envisioned centers becoming more involved in training and supporting members in using online resources and less involved in the traditional roles of circulating films and assisting with clearing names, functions being supplanted by new FamilySearch.¹⁴ The number of centers rose to 3,572 by the end of the century¹⁵ and reached a plateau of about 4,600 by 2009.¹⁶

The *Family History Center Memorandum*, a serial published from 1979 to 2007, functioned as a key point of communications from headquarters to centers. Later, the department replaced it with emails to center directors.¹⁷ In addition to the *Memorandum*, the department added a page to FamilySearch Internet in 2002 that provided training materials for center staff.¹⁸ By 1995, the department had worked for many years on revising the 1983 operations guide for centers and had reduced it from 200 to 80 pages.¹⁹ It published the guide in 1998.²⁰ It issued a revision of the guide in 2006 available only on FamilySearch Internet.²¹

Microfilm Circulation

Lacking budget in the middle 1990s to develop technology, Reynolds Cahoon, the managing director of the department at the time, looked for ways to distribute non-genealogical functions elsewhere. He chose to transfer microfilm distribution to the Church unit responsible for distributing all Church materials, the Materials Management Department.²² In early 1995, the Church transferred the microfilm circulation management to the Church Distribution Center, located in southwest Salt Lake City. The Church transferred the film copies being held at the Church Office Building to the Distribution Center.²³ It took two years to work out all the problems and to implement the program worldwide.²⁴ The transfer permitted automation to eliminate many manual elements of microfilm processing. Software used by the Salt Lake City Distribution Center was modified to handle microfilm circulation, and a massive storage and conveyer system was installed to robotically retrieve films for mailing to the United States.²⁵ For other countries, ordering centers overseas circulated films.²⁶

When the circulation transfer to Materials Management was complete in 1997, the department increased the loan rate to \$3.25 (\$2.00 from 1979 to 1997) for a 60-day loan and the same amount for 60 more days.²⁷ A decade later, in 2006, the department raised the rate to \$5.50.²⁸ Prior to that change, the cost to circulate microfilm substantially exceeded the fees collected for this service.²⁹



Automated Microfilm Circulation Courtesy Jolynn Johnson

Some centers handled large inventories of films with no system to manage them. For many years, the department considered but never funded an inventory management system. However, in 1999, it released Inventory Manager, which permitted a center to order, check in or out, and manage microfilms.³⁰ The department released updates in 2000 and 2002.³¹ In 1994, microfilm orders were sent by fax, telephone, mail, and modem.³² The system required payment at a center before the order could be submitted. First in Europe in 2008 and then worldwide in 2010, the department deployed an Internet ordering system in which a person paid for an order using a credit card.³³ In an effort to draw on community resources, the department decided in late 1994 to circulate films to public institutions and tested the idea at 20 sites.³⁴ The response was very positive.³⁵ After four years, circulation was expanded to an additional 12 sites.³⁶ The department approved the National Archives of Colombia

as the first archival circulation site.³⁷ It added more sites over time.³⁸ In 2007 it approved public institutions to store indefinite loan microfilms.³⁹

Family History Computers

Recognizing the benefit of computers in nearly all areas of Church operations, the department established a policy in 1995 for deploying computers for all family history purposes in local facilities, including centers in the United States and Canada.⁴⁰ It also began funding of delivery to international centers.⁴¹ New funding approval continued annually thereafter.⁴² In 1998, the department assumed responsibility for replacing computers in centers in the United States as it was already doing internationally and did so over a two-year period.⁴³ In 2005, the department approved at least one computer and one printer for each new center.⁴⁴

With the launch of FamilySearch Internet, the department desired universal Church access to the Internet site. The department obtained permission to allow Internet connections for family history centers in the United States and began to enable connections on a test basis in 2000.⁴⁵ In 2001, the department announced permission for connections in all centers in the United States.⁴⁶ It extended the permission to centers outside the United States in 2002.⁴⁷ In 2003, the department then allocated funds to enable Internet access, removing the financial burden from local units.⁴⁸

Department leadership realized that a communications network would benefit all Church programs and enlisted the support of the Information and Communication Services Department to enable broadband connectivity in meetinghouses Church wide, with the Family History Department as the initial user.⁴⁹ By the end of 2005, 87 percent of centers had Internet access as compared to 23 percent in 2003.⁵⁰ By 2008, the total numbers of centers with Internet access had risen to 94 percent. Most of those had broadband access, with dial-up access only in places where there no other option existed.⁵¹

Regional Centers

Over time, regional family history centers developed within the family history center system. These regional centers had more resources than regular centers, such as additional equipment, expanded staff, and permanent film collections. These additional resources enabled regional centers to serve patrons better. These centers could also call upon department headquarters for more financial support than could be obtained locally.⁵² By the end of 2011, 15 regional family history centers had been established, located primarily in the western United States in areas with high concentrations of Church members.⁵³ London also had a regional center, the only one outside the United States.⁵⁴



Riverton Utah FamilySearch Library Courtesy The Church

Compact disc technology continued to be used in centers until the delivery of FamilySearch Internet in 1999. However, as early as 1996, the department authorized and funded a local area network (LAN) for six regional centers to replace compact disc readers continually breaking down from overuse.⁵⁵ The department did not fund LANs after the initial outlay, probably because of the anticipated potential of the Internet to replace CD technology.⁵⁶

In late 2008, the department set a new direction for consolidating centers when it began considering a transition from local centers to full-fledged libraries in areas with high Church populations.⁵⁷ The facilities would provide extended hours, broader research assistance, access to significantly more resources, and reduce staffing requirements by replacing multiple centers with a small library. In June 2010, the Riverton FamilySearch Library opened in the southern section of Salt Lake County, while the Church closed centers in twenty-four nearby stakes.⁵⁸ When the Los Angeles Regional Center reopened in 2010, it was re-designated as the Los Angeles FamilySearch Library.⁵⁹

Prison Centers

In an innovative first, the department established the South Point Family History Center at the Utah State Prison in 1990.⁶⁰ By 1994, it ranked among the top 15 centers in microfilm circulation, and had a very high name extraction output.⁶¹ In 2010, film circulation to the Utah State Prison

exceeded circulation to any other center.⁶² That same year, the indexing output continued to rank high as volunteers from the South Point Family History Center provided 146,000 names through FamilySearch indexing.⁶³ Earlier, volunteers at the prison had extracted the records of the Freedman's Bank collection, as discussed in the previous chapter. Other extraction programs were introduced in prisons elsewhere in Utah as well as in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho.⁶⁴



Missionaries at the South Point Family History Center Courtesy Deseret News.
Photographer: Jeffrey D. Allred

This family history service changed lives. One inmate reported, "I'm getting to pay back society through this service work that I'm doing right here." A report noted that some hardened criminals broke down in tears upon finding a long-lost family member; further, genealogy work led some inmates to reconciliation within their own families.⁶⁵ Commenting on his contact with the prisoners, Elder Howard Cheney, a FamilySearch missionary, said, "The fascinating thing to me is when they do this work, even in that environment, they feel the Spirit. . . . It feels so good to them that they just want to do this. . . . Some of them would just live there [if they were allowed to]. They would just spend their entire

time there. . . . In that work, because it's so critical, miracles are performed there all the time."⁶⁶

One prisoner wrote to him, "I can't imagine getting through my years in the system without that peace that came through service to people who were in effect in prison as much as I was. . . . I turned from suicide, complete hopelessness, and [being] ready to give up on myself and my life to an attitude that I could fight and win against all the negatives to which I was subject within the system. . . . Because I was able to spend that time in service, I survived as a positive, productive person with a loving wife and family, with children and grandchildren."⁶⁷

Worldwide Support

In addition to creating family history centers to support the genealogical community, the department fielded requests coming into headquarters. Questions and requests generally fell into two categories: product questions and genealogy research questions. In the 1990s, product questions concerned Personal Ancestral File, compact disc publications, extraction and indexing products, and FamilySearch Internet. Most product questions came by phone or email (after 1994) to a response team who either answered the questions or forwarded them to other staff who could answer them.⁶⁸ During the same period, most research questions came by letter or email to the Family History Library staff for their response.

In 2001, it implemented the Product Support feature on FamilySearch Internet.⁶⁹ To support his feature, the department purchased an online service known as Talisma, a customer relationship management tool to route and track questions to ensure they were answered. It was a small system based heavily on telephone service. Also, in addition to opening up one-on-one contact, the web page provided self-help, with common answers and common solutions to frequent

issues.⁷⁰ While a step forward, it would be insufficient for the expansion of service being planned.

Envisioning the Unified System, the department determined that it was equally important to provide personal assistance globally for genealogical research as to deliver software and content. This determination entailed transforming support from a headquarters organization to a global one and taking advantage of genealogical skill found to serve people wherever they lived, a dramatic shift from the service offered at the time.⁷¹

In September 2000, the number of non-English-speaking Church members exceeded for the first time the number of English-speaking Church members.⁷² The Church operated worldwide, yet the ability of the department to support family history work remained relatively limited. When hired in 2002 to create a worldwide support organization, Don Anderson found that “not very many people were aware the help existed, and in general only for North America, only speaking English, only during North American business hours, and frankly focused on a pretty small segment of patrons who were aware of us.” To address this situation, Anderson sought to radically expand the capacity of support and extend its coverage. The solution was to rely on missionaries rather than new employees and engage local Church leadership in family history activity. Ultimately, the department desired to create a system entirely dependent on those outside the department for answers.⁷³

Prior to his department service, Anderson had worked for seventeen years in the remote customer support industry and had considerable international experience.⁷⁴ He recognized that people locally understood and responded more effectively to questions than someone at department headquarters. Still, the question remained as to whether enough people had enough time to serve as missionaries in areas outside of North America.⁷⁵

Beginning in 2003, the department implemented a new model of reaching the worldwide membership. It consisted of three tiers of support, spanning from local to headquarters levels, based on the difficulty of the question. Conceptually, local assistance would answer most questions, intermediate assistance would answer the more difficult questions, and headquarters assistance would answer those questions requiring specialized knowledge to answer.⁷⁶ Tier 1 assistance consisted of ward family history consultants, tier 2 of family history missionaries and of support center staff. Local consultants referred questions that exceeded their expertise to headquarters technical support, or tier 3.⁷⁷ In 2003, the department folded selected staff members from the Acquisitions Division into the Worldwide Support staff to help support centers and priesthood leaders outside the United States and Canada.⁷⁸ With long-term experience in family history work and products, they required little training to fill their new positions. In 2004, the department created area support offices, later renamed FamilySearch support offices, as the backbone for tier 2 support.⁷⁹

In time, tier 3 support, which handled the most advanced or difficult questions for both product and research questions, could refer all incoming questions to headquarters units, where the expertise to answer them resided. Questions about ordinance data in new FamilySearch were answered by a unit created to ensure data quality in temple ordinance files. Likewise, research

questions requiring expertise in a foreign language or script were routed to staff in the Family History Library. In 2010, queries were all handled electronically. Even handwritten letters were scanned and managed by Amdocs, customer relationship manager software in use in 2010.⁸⁰

In a prior development beginning in 1994, the department began to supplement full-time missionaries with part-time volunteers, called Church-service missionaries.⁸¹ The Church Human Resources Department had begun the Church-service program in 1981 primarily to supplement the headquarters workforce. Church leaders commissioned J. Clark Whitehead from 1998 to 2000 as the director of Church-service missionaries to decentralize and deploy the program worldwide. He began in the U.S. Intermountain West and then expanded to Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico. The number of missionaries grew from 3,720 to 5,760 during his term of service. The Church-service approach fit those who could not serve full-time missions because of health, family, or financial reasons. These Church-service missionaries served up to 30 hours a week for varying periods of time. During Whitehead's tenure, two-thirds of them extended their initial term of service.⁸² In 2000, the department began to call Church-service missionaries through local Church leaders to fill family history roles.⁸³ This corps of Church-service missionaries extended to the entire Church the family history services once offered only at headquarters.

In 2003, only 50 employees and 5 missionaries at department headquarters answered questions only in English. In 2007, the department minimally increased the number of employees at department headquarters from 50 to 60, but an entirely new complement of 56 employees served at 14 area-support offices around the world. More significantly, the five missionaries of 2003 had burgeoned in four years to 450 support missionaries in the United States and Canada and 350 elsewhere in the world. They answered questions at home by phone or by other forms of communication in 12 languages for members in 110 countries.⁸⁴ Of the 800 missionaries, about 700 served part-time and operated primarily from home, which permitted many to serve who might not otherwise have been able to do so.⁸⁵ Some even served from nursing homes.⁸⁶ A great majority of these missionaries volunteered to continue their service after completing the initial commitment of serving for 18 months.⁸⁷

This support system developed into a 24/7 operation; questions asked in one part of the world could be answered by someone in another part of the world. For instance, a question posed in the evening by someone in North America might be answered by someone in Australia, where it was morning. It not only supported users worldwide but engaged the service and abilities of respondents worldwide.⁸⁸ In the course of eight years, from 2003 to 2011, a system that handled 35,000 cases annually grew to handle over four million cases per year.⁸⁹ In 2012, about 2,100 Church-service missionaries served the genealogical community throughout the world.⁹⁰

Support Technology

The technological foundation of worldwide support consisted of three communication products. The first deployed at the end of 2003, implemented a new customer relationship management system called Clarify, later renamed Amdocs) to replace Talisma. Used by some of the largest organizations in the world, it tracked activities with customers, the questions they

asked, and the responses they received. Over time, it identified the questions being asked most often and the products requiring the most attention. The department coupled the response system with a knowledge base system called Kanisa, which stored information to be used multiple times to answer repeat questions. This system armed all tiers of support with the knowledge to answer questions, populated the “Ask a Question” function on FamilySearch Internet as well as the non-public reference of 2 and tier 3 personnel.

Three years later, the department acquired the second communications product—a Siebel telephone system that used VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) technology to route incoming calls over the Internet to anyone on the network. This technology permitted a call from anywhere to be routed over the Internet anywhere else for an answer, making possible the assistance of missionaries’ worldwide in answering questions from their homes. Calls could be made at no charge to the patron to any of about 140 numbers available around the world.⁹¹ Then in its infancy, the technology was a calculated risk for the department. It turned out well because the technology matured and remained effective over time.⁹²

The last product of the technology trio was a system to manage from one central place thousands of computers spread worldwide at centers and temples. Penney Devey oversaw the communications network. When tasked with supporting computers worldwide, she studied the issue with a small team and recommended the software from a former employer, LANDesk. Verkler ran the recommendation through the regular process of investigating all alternatives and determined that it was the best product for the scale of the envisioned system.⁹³ He also pulled in the Church’s Information and Communication Services Department to broaden the scope of the project to serve all Church activities.⁹⁴

The department installed the LANDesk Management Suite in 2006, prior to the rollout of new FamilySearch. LANDesk permitted a technician at headquarters to troubleshoot a computer elsewhere in the world.⁹⁵ It allowed the technician not only to solve problems but to install software, revolutionizing how the department supported computers in centers worldwide. It also provided an inventory of all computers used in centers. For instance, prior to the delivery of new FamilySearch, this inventory identified all computers that did not have sufficient memory to run the new program so that they could be upgraded.⁹⁶ In addition, the system provided usage statistics and service response reports so that headquarters staff could pinpoint problems in the network.⁹⁷

Research Wiki

After the creation of Worldwide Support in 2002, that division fielded both product and research questions. The department transferred Michael Ritchey from the library to handle the genealogy research queries. The idea was to create a self-service model—to use missionaries in answering the less complicated questions and to refer more difficult questions to the library staff. He determined that while the knowledge base in Kanisa was helpful in answering product-oriented issues, it did not effectively retrieve all the data needed to answer research questions.⁹⁸ There were too many possible questions and multiple answers to a question based on the research need.⁹⁹ The desirable solution was to obtain a content management system that

would combine the research information compiled by the department for many years and the functionality effectively to retrieve information that answered a specific question. Such a system might also be expanded to encompass content created by the genealogical community with its wealth of genealogical expertise beyond the expertise initially provided by the department.

Ritchey turned to open-source content management software and had the missionaries enter into it all of the content from Research Helps on FamilySearch Internet. He didn't ask for money and used personal funds to obtain server space. The Research Support unit then began upgrading and expanding the content. At first, it served as an in-house product for missionaries to use in answering questions. In stages, Ritchey advanced the product into wider use, first over the Internet for missionaries located remotely and later to ward family history consultants. Then he said, "Hey, shouldn't we open this up to the public because the information is getting really good, and it's quite a bit better than what's on FamilySearch?" When the department finally approved his idea, it provided the engineering and hosting support.¹⁰⁰ The Research Wiki had been born. While useful as an in-house tool, it also met the requirement of providing a self-service method for users to answer their own questions.

Research Wiki

Get research advice, or learn where to find record collections in our **76,302** articles

Search by place or topic (not individual):

Search Tips:

- Start with broad localities, then click through to smaller ones
Example: England
- Use keywords, not phrases
Example: Hispanic Resources

- About the Wiki
- Wiki Tools
- Success Stories

Beginning Genealogy

- Start your family history
- Select computer software
- Organize your records
- Research Principles

More research helps

Find Records by Place

- United States
- England
- Germany
- Ireland

All countries

Research Tools

- Looking for the Research Outlines?
- Census Records
- Research Forms

More research tools

Wiki for Groups

- Family History Centers
- Societies and Libraries
- Adopt a Page
- Wiki Trainers

User Group Meetings

Wiki News

- Images from FHCs
- International Wiki growth
- New Wiki Home Design
- Community Council

More News

Build the Wiki

- Make your first edit
- Find things to do
- Connect with others
- Wiki Care

More help articles

New to the Research Wiki?

In the FamilySearch Research Wiki, you can learn how to do genealogical research or share your knowledge with others.

[Learn More](#)

Research Articles

- Browse by country
- Browse by topic
- Research Process
- Wiki Tools
- About the Wiki
- Wiki Home

Volunteer

- Submit Wiki Content
- Community Center
- Community Meetings
- Contributor Help
- Personal Sandbox
- Manual of Style
- Guiding Principles
- Wiki Home

Views

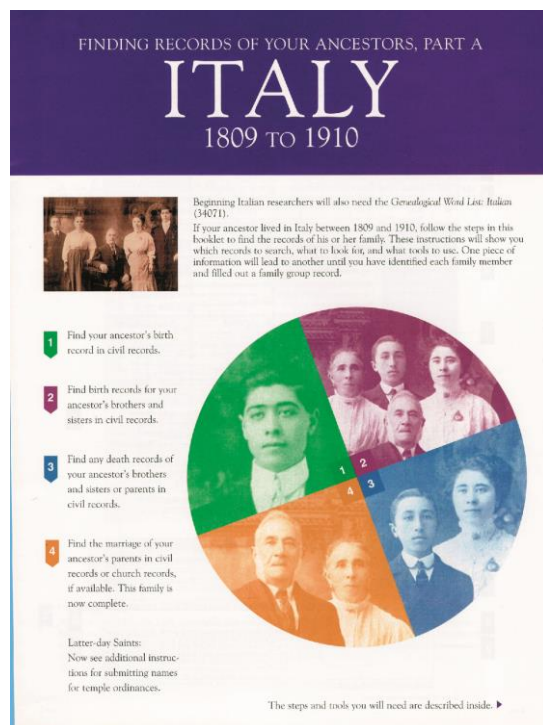
Toolbox

Personal tools

Research Wiki Entry Page Courtesy Candy Steinhorst

Delivered in 2008, the Research Wiki was a first in several respects. It drew upon the knowledge of the general public as well as Church resources in a Church-sponsored product. It came out as an online publication to be perfected over time rather than requiring polishing before publication, typically the case in standard publication processes. It was the first publication effort in which Correlation (a group responsible to ensure product consistency and uphold intellectual property standards in Church publications) chose to review the product periodically after publication rather than to delay publication until after approval.¹⁰¹ It also passed a legal hurdle in which the Church sponsored a publishing product not under copyright. All of these firsts required overcoming internal hurdles, unprecedented in the history of Church publications.¹⁰²

Engaging the efforts of many people in the genealogical community, the wiki provided a means to deliver much more content than could be generated by a small group of research experts at department headquarters. While this headquarters group provided the seed content, experienced genealogists around the world generated more and more content. For example, the department asked Nathan Murphy, a Family History Library consultant, to upgrade the Tennessee entries in the wiki. He solicited the help of the genealogical community in conjunction with the 2010 Federation of Genealogical Societies Conference held in Knoxville, Tennessee. Within a few months, the wiki entries on subjects related to Tennessee had grown from one statewide guide to 93 county guides and from 40 pages to 1000 pages of content.¹⁰³ An additional component of the Research Wiki called Forums permitted the broader resources of the genealogical community to answer questions as opposed to just headquarters staff.



**Italy Research Guide for Beginner Courtesy
Family History Department**

Research Publications

Prior to the Research Wiki, the department authored many research publications. Beginning in the 1989, it published outlines of the resources to use in researching the records of states and countries.¹⁰⁴ These outlines were encyclopedic and did not help beginners with little skill in the research process. In 1999, staff devised a new design to make outlines more useful for novices.¹⁰⁵ The new series of basic aids that started coming out in 2001, with the series title *Finding Records of Your Ancestors*, presented a step-by-step process for starting research in specific countries, including Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Italy, France, Iceland, and the United States (African-American). At a coordinating council of representatives from all Church libraries in 2002, one respected genealogical educator proclaimed them to be the finest research publications ever offered by the department. Still, genealogical methodology changes constantly in the

digital world, which quickly outdated the publications. Less than two months after the publication of the African-American guide in 2003, Ancestry gave the Family History Library and family history centers a subscription to its online census indexes, outdating the procedure of using microfilm indexes described in the publication.¹⁰⁶

The transition of the department to digital technology halted the authoring of publications for five years, pending the creation of the Research Subsystem. The new model was to author content online, though this model took time to develop. The department lifted the moratorium on new publications in 2008, and these publications began to be developed and released again, not as print publications but as downloadable content on FamilySearch Internet, where it published guides for Finland, England, and Scotland.¹⁰⁷ Research publications during this period focused on doing research worldwide rather than in just researching the collection of the Family History Library.¹⁰⁸ The department eventually loaded all research outlines and guides into the Research Wiki, which is now the source of all research publications. The advantages of digital publication are the ease of updating, the ability to search for specific content, and the wide availability.

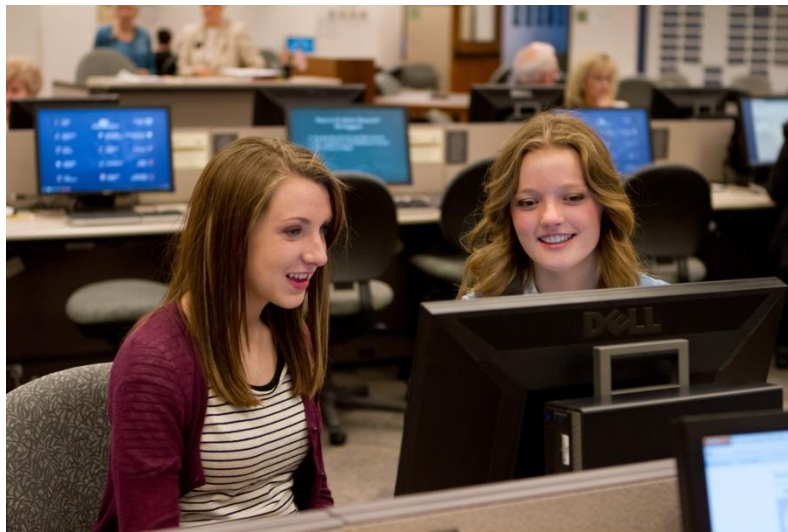
Online Classes

The Internet created new opportunities to deliver instruction remotely. In 2005, the department started developing online training for ward family history consultants, priesthood leaders, and area support missionaries to be delivered through an online learning management system. Online tutorials prepared missionaries, leaders, and consultants to assist others in using new FamilySearch as it was delivered from 2007 to 2009. In 2010, the department purchased SmartBuilder, an enterprise e-learning tool to replace all previous programs in developing interactive e-learning for all department audiences.¹⁰⁹ In 2011, FamilySearch.org offered a broad range of videos, tutorials, and PDFs for those who used FamilySearch products, such as the Research Wiki, FamilySearch indexing, and new FamilySearch, and for those who trained others on using them.

In 2008, the department began to develop video courses on research topics, also delivered over the Internet. The first set of video classes, five on doing family history research in England, came out in November 2008.¹¹⁰ In September 2010, the video classes covered research in seven countries: England, Germany, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Mexico, Russia, and the United States. People not on the department staff, such as prominent genealogists Tom Jones and Thomas Kemp, offered classes through the department on general research principles and techniques. Other institutions contributed content, such as the Mid-Continent Public Library in Independence, Missouri, which provided 12 classes on U.S. research.¹¹¹ Some classes were interactive, such as a course on reading German handwriting, in which students could match English and German characters or transcribe selected words from a document. The correct text appeared in green and incorrect answers appeared in red.¹¹²

Family History Library

The Internet changed the landscape of information seeking. Whereas encyclopedias once served to answer questions, Wikipedia became a main source for finding basic information. This shift meant that the general public seeking information often went online before going in the doors of a library. Prior to the 21st century, the Family History Library functioned as a central resource for assisting individuals to identify their deceased ancestors, though it reached primarily those seeking assistance on-site. Patronage declined as users found information online. In 2002, department leadership concluded that the library model of service delivery could not be scaled globally. Consequently, they inaugurated Worldwide Support to serve the entire world through digital information delivery. Since the library served only a limited number of Church members, the department redefined its role as a flagship operation to “a preeminent research institution and . . . the family history center for the greater Salt Lake City area.”¹¹³ In 2003, the department cut back library’s operation hours to open at 8:00 rather than 7:30 a.m. and to close at 9:00 rather than 10:00 p.m., a schedule that had been in effect since 1976.¹¹⁴ The library continued to have a broad influence as more than half of the patronage came from outside the state.¹¹⁵



Family History Library Computer Work Stations Courtesy The Church

Library remodeling projects in 2001 and 2004 improved the layout and functionality of the library to provide a more satisfying patron experience. The 2004 remodel was particularly important because the collections that had been moved previously to the FamilySearch Center were returned to the library, with the result that the entire collection resided again under one roof, available to patrons without requiring them to walk between the two buildings. The departments also created

facilities to accommodate the growing missionary force in the library.¹¹⁶ A computer lab with 30 stations was built for group instruction on computer products.¹¹⁷ Still, as the Internet became a preeminent source of digitized images and indexes, attendance at the library declined from 2,400 patrons per day in 2001 to 1,800 patrons per day in 2007.¹¹⁸ At the same time, the library became as much a provider of digital information as of print information. Computer stations multiplied. From 1994 to 1999, all of the library’s patron computers were located in a single room.¹¹⁹ The patron computer count grew to 70 by 1999, but it swelled to 475 by 2010.¹²⁰ In 2001, the library had a single digital microfilm scanner.¹²¹ By 2010, it had 24 digital scanners, providing the patron free image downloads from films.¹²²

The department facilitated access to the library's digital resources in 2001 by the creation of the patron desktop, a single interface to local digital and Internet resources.¹²³ The initial version was done as a custom programming project. It was expensive to maintain and did not function well. The department commissioned a group of library experts to solve the problem without funding or custom programming. In 2003, they created an HTML desktop using the built-in services of the Windows Active Directory Desktop Services. The desktop could be changed and updated without engineering support. All compact disc material was loaded to the local server and could be accessed through the desktop, without requiring patrons to check out a compact disc. Desktops also provided free access to many Internet sources available outside the library by subscription only.¹²⁴ It continued to serve library patrons in 2011.

The main downside to this expansion of digital workstations and services was that the library moved many books to closed shelving where they could not be browsed by patrons. The floor space packed with computers left little room for bookshelves. Consequently, when researchers found a book they wanted listed in the catalog, they sometimes had to request a library attendant to retrieve it.

The library continually attracted media attention. In 2000, there were 56 media visits, 75 in 2001, and 141 in 2002.¹²⁵ The visits peaked in 2002 because of the 2002 Winter Olympics, held in the Salt Lake City area in February. During the Olympics, the library hummed with media activity and visits of foreign delegations, but sparse on researchers, who appeared to have been scared away by the crowds. Media

interest was high and steady, with an average of eight to ten media contacts each day. The library conducted VIP tours for members of the International Olympic Organizing Committee and their spouses. These visitors received personal attention and were generally very positive about their experiences.¹²⁶ After a 2005 review of library services revealed deficiencies in serving research novices, Ray Wright, the library director, implemented new procedures to "to ensure that people who come to the library for

the first time won't leave empty-handed." In six months, he recruited a new force of nearly 200 Church service missionaries to provide one-on-one attention to each person walking into the library.¹²⁷ He contacted the local Area Presidency, who asked stake presidents to recruit the needed volunteers, a method not used previously. One role entailed to go beyond greeting and not just point to where novices needed to go but to take them there and hand them off to



Family History Library Tour for Family Members of the Olympic Organizing Committee Courtesy Elaine Hasleton

someone else to enrich their experience. The library desired to ensure that novices had a successful experience during their very first visit to the library.¹²⁸

In 2011, the library remained a Mecca for genealogists serious about research. Tour groups came regularly from many states and foreign countries. In addition to a collection of over 2.4 million microfilm rolls, the library had over 350,000 books, providing the single most concentrated source of genealogical information for the ancestry of mankind. At the close of the decade, that role was expanding. Having been integrated into Worldwide Support in 2008, library staff, with their research skill and expertise in developing e-learning resources and the Research Wiki, could deploy their expertise electronically, with a huge impact in the genealogical community, serving researchers wherever they might be located.¹²⁹

Tragedy and Recovery

A random shooting at the library on April 15, 1999, shocked the department and the public. A gunman, thought to be schizophrenic and to have not taken his medication, killed two and wounded four others before being shot by police. As the incident unfolded, Church security officers on assignment in the building immediately began moving people out of the line of fire.¹³⁰ The library remained closed from that Thursday to Monday of the following week, allowing time for the trauma to dispel.¹³¹

Nellie Leighton's story is indicative of the resiliency of those serving in the library. Shot in the face by the gunman, she returned after a miraculous recovery to complete her missionary service. She then served a second mission at the library. Elder Spencer J. Condie of the Seventy recognized her at a missionary devotional in October 2000, saying that she let go of all the terror, the injuries, and the fear of that day. When he asked her if she had been able to forgive the man, she gave a firm, "Yes!"¹³² In 2011, she still served at the very same desk where she was shot over a decade earlier.

Cultural and Ethnic Events



Darius Gray Presentation at the First African-American Open House Courtesy Deseret News. Photographer: Johanna Kirk

Following the practice at some local family history centers, the library began sponsoring cultural and ethnic events. It held the first African-American open house on February 22, 2003. Despite sodden weather, the library welcomed a large turnout of representatives of the African-American community in Utah. Attendees went to classes on African-American research and received a compact disc of the Freedman's Bank Records, then recently released by the department.¹³³

The first Hispanic open house, held on October 18, 2003, coincided with Hispanic Heritage Month. Attendees learned of the

resources freely available to them.¹³⁴ The library continued to sponsor these events and others throughout the decade. In addition, staff taught multiple courses to those with specific cultural and ethnic heritages on many Saturdays throughout the year, such as Scandinavians, Germans, American Indians, Scots, Italians, and French, among others.¹³⁵

Accreditation

In 1964, the department began to accredit researchers to provide a recommendation for many researchers who desired professional assistance. Seeking to unencumber itself from the drain on resources and personnel time and to establish an independent accreditation organization, in 2000, the department gave responsibility for this program to the International Commission for the Accreditation of Professional Genealogists (ICAPGen). An affiliate of the Utah Genealogical Association (UGA) at the time, ICAPGen was a fully incorporated nonprofit institution, operating as a completely independent testing organization.¹³⁶ Though there is no official relationship between the department and ICAPGen, many department staff members, primarily in the library, are still involved in administering the program. As the library director, Ray Wright required professional staff to become accredited by ICAPGen or by the Board for Certification of Genealogists, from which they could receive a credential known as Board Certified Genealogist (BCG).

Downtown FamilySearch Center

The FamilySearch Center, housed in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building on the opposite side of Temple Square from the Family History Library, opened just prior to the 1994 centennial celebration of the department, with a primary resource of 206 computers.¹³⁷ The department conceived of it as a resource center for beginning researchers, taking the load off the library, which had only 25 computers in a single room at that date. On the fourth floor, the center also housed the Family Group Record Archives Collection and film copies of the 1920 U.S. federal census, recently released by the National Archives.¹³⁸ The department transferred the library's 70,000 volume collection of family histories to the center in 1998, when the library ran out of space. These resources improved the chance of a novice finding information on an ancestor. He or she could then take the information to the library for further investigation.¹³⁹

The FamilySearch Center also had two computer lab classrooms, open to the public for group training. These classrooms were used to train tour groups that arrived during the summer months and Church groups, Scouting groups, family organizations, and others throughout the year. Staffing for the center consisted primarily of missionaries and some department employees. Until 2010, sister missionaries serving next door at Temple Square also assisted. It gave them a chance to learn about family history services and products, knowledge they could take home with them after their service. It also gave them the opportunity to explain gospel principles to visitors when asked.¹⁴⁰

During the 2004 remodel of the Family History Library, space was allocated on the main floor for the family histories to be returned to improve the patron experience of finding all research sources in the library.¹⁴¹ In 2004, the Family Group Records Archives, consisting of forms used

to submit names for temple work from 1942 to 1969, was moved to long-term storage, which meant that microfilm access would be the only access thereafter.¹⁴² The department approved the sheets for destruction in 2009, an anticlimactic footnote to the discomfort generated when the department proposed to destroy the sheets in 1979, thirty years earlier.¹⁴³ Likewise, it removed the 1920 census film copies from the Center.



FamilySearch Center Computer Stations Courtesy the Church

With the expansion of computers in the library and the absence of these auxiliary collections, visits to the FamilySearch Center declined.¹⁴⁴ Annual patronage dropped from 242,478 in 2003 to 119,572 by 2005.¹⁴⁵ Staffing was reduced to one employee and the number of computers to 82, a fourth the number when it opened.

With its research role diminished, the center focused on introducing beginners to

family history and encouraging their involvement through exhibits and group training.¹⁴⁶ The department renovated the facility in 2009 to give visitors a feeling for their ancestors and to invite visitors to get involved in family history. For instance, in 2010, souvenir photos could be taken with a replica of an old-fashioned camera box against a backdrop mural of Ellis Island. Afterward, the center emailed these photos to the visitors. Beneath a large screen that advertised FamilySearch indexing, missionaries did indexing when not otherwise busy.¹⁴⁷ In this configuration, the FamilySearch Center engaged visitors in family history regardless of their interest in doing research.

Library Public Affairs

The Library Public Affairs unit served as a key point of contact between the library and the public. It emerged from a long-term effort to author family histories given as gifts to selected visiting dignitaries. The effort began after the television miniseries *Roots* in January 1977 popularized family history and demonstrated its power to affect current generations. The department sponsored 120 family history projects over the next 20 years. The quality of these histories varied because there was no standard procedure, format, or editorial control.¹⁴⁸ In 1995, the department appointed Elaine Hasleton to be in charge of these projects. Two years later the department, under the direction of the First Presidency, established a unit to facilitate the research and production of these projects. Initially called the Special Projects Unit and later known as Library Public Affairs, Hasleton directed its work for fifteen years through 2010.¹⁴⁹

The new unit could only work on projects approved by the First Presidency. Hasleton's team established the guidelines for the scope, content, and production of these family histories. The new criteria for projects required that information be derived from original documents. The unit often worked late into the night and on weekends to accomplish the work in the time frame specified. The essential components of the publications included an introductory overview of the content, compiled pedigree charts and family group sheets, acid-free copies of the supporting documents for each of the direct-line ancestors, and an appendix that could include maps, descendant charts, additional supporting historical information, a bibliography of sources, and suggestions for further research. Over the next 15 years, the new unit authored 73 family histories. These histories included family histories for such individuals as presidents of the United States after Carter and their spouses, other government leaders, the descendants of civil rights activist Martin Luther King III, historian David G. McCullough, and the famed news anchor Walter Cronkite.



Walter Cronkite Visits Family History Library
Courtesy Elain Hasleton

The unit also hosted foreign dignitaries. For example, it received 115 VIP visits in 2000 and 203 visits in 2001, just before the 2002 Olympics.¹⁵⁰ Visitors included archivists who had cooperated with the acquisitions program of the department, ambassadors, and other dignitaries. These visitors were invariably impressed with the breadth of the collection and the quality of the service and facilities.

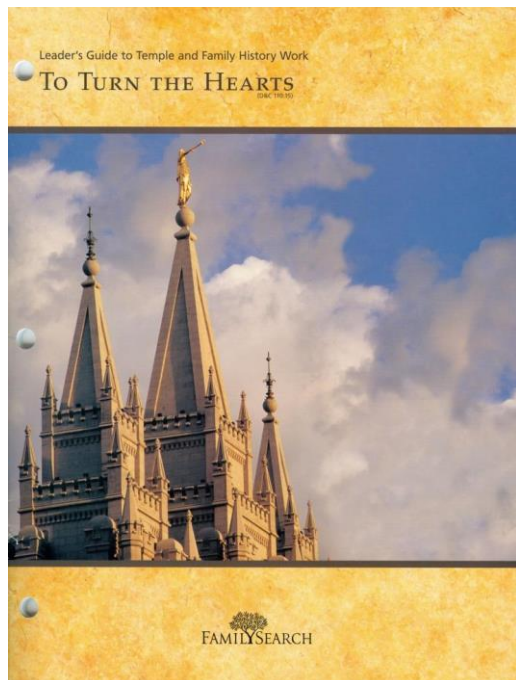
At the time of the unit's creation in 1997, Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve commented to the unit that "these projects will help to bring the Church out of obscurity."¹⁵¹ Given the scope of its accomplishments and the appreciation expressed by those receiving the gift of their heritage, this small group of people engendered a broad ripple of good will to the world.

Local Unit Organization

Over time, the department and its presiding councils looked at the organization of family history in local units. They determined that most members did not know who to go to for assistance with family history, and that there was little clarity on the difference between leadership roles for family history at the ward and stake levels.¹⁵² To address these issues, they suggested edits to the Church's administrative guide, the *Church Handbook of Instructions*. Throughout the 20th century, the Church published this handbook to guide the administration of local Church units. In 1995, the department began discussing a significant change to the portion of the handbook dealing with family history. These changes finally made it to print in the 1998 edition of the handbook.¹⁵³ The revised handbook designated the high priests group leader in every ward as the person primarily responsible to coordinate temple and family history work and to supervise ward family history consultants.¹⁵⁴ Later, in 2003, Don Anderson,

the director of Worldwide Support, began reviewing the 1998 handbook, with additional changes being published in the 2006 edition of the handbook.¹⁵⁵

The process to review and update the handbook was grueling because of the number of people involved in editing and approving changes. With regard to the 2006 edition, the General Authority leadership of the department and the First Presidency approved the changes, and then President Boyd K. Packer spent a weekend reviewing them. A long-term proponent of family history work but without an official responsibility for it at the time, he still cared enough to review the changes carefully. As Elder Marlin K. Jensen observed, it was “pretty heavy reading, not the kind of thing you’d want to curl up with on a cold winter night. He took that home and read it very carefully and made a number of editorial suggestions.” It touched Elder Jensen that the Apostle, who had a “multitude of things to do and worries and concerns,” cared enough to take the “time to carefully look at that and try to assess what its impact would be on



Church Leader's Guide Courtesy Family History Department

the Church's leaders, on the Church's members, on family history workers, as well as looking at it for doctrinal and procedural and other points. He helped make it better than it was and is the master teacher and master editor anyway.”¹⁵⁶

The 2006 edition placed emphasis on the role of family history consultants first to reach out to every individual and family in the ward and second to serve in family history centers. It expanded the role of the high priests group leader to coordinate family history activity through the priesthood executive committee and ward council meetings. Further, it eliminated all ward extraction callings and made extraction a stake program. At the stake level, the handbook concentrated all stake-level activities under the direction of the high councilor in charge of family history. This high councilor also supervised any

family history centers in the stake.¹⁵⁷ The handbook formalized the calling of family history area adviser to promulgate family history work at the area level and report to the Area President.¹⁵⁸

Don Anderson was also involved during 2009 in updating the family history section of a reformatted handbook,¹⁵⁹ published in 2010 as *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*.¹⁶⁰ The most significant change was to give the ward council a role in supporting family history activity in the ward. The Church also simplified the handbook. The department published more detailed assistance in *To Turn the Hearts: Leader's Guide to Temple and Family History*. The department took the opportunity of a new guide to infuse some of the joy felt when discovering ancestors. Rather than being primarily text, as had been the case in previous manuals, it was designed to attract and inspire leaders with illustrations, quotes, diagrams, and space for notes.¹⁶¹

The department also authored a companion video to the *Leader's Guide*. Taking a new tack on developing content, it created content without scripts and actors. Instead, video producers documented stakes in which success in family history work exceeded the norm. The video focused on the Springfield Illinois Stake, with video producers sending in camera crews to record real leadership meetings, to interview Church leaders, and to follow individuals and families as they became involved in family history. It demonstrated rather than prescribed leadership principles for a successful family history program. The risk of going in without a predetermined outcome allowed the creators to capture honest and powerful stories of how family history impacts people's lives.¹⁶²

Ward Consultants

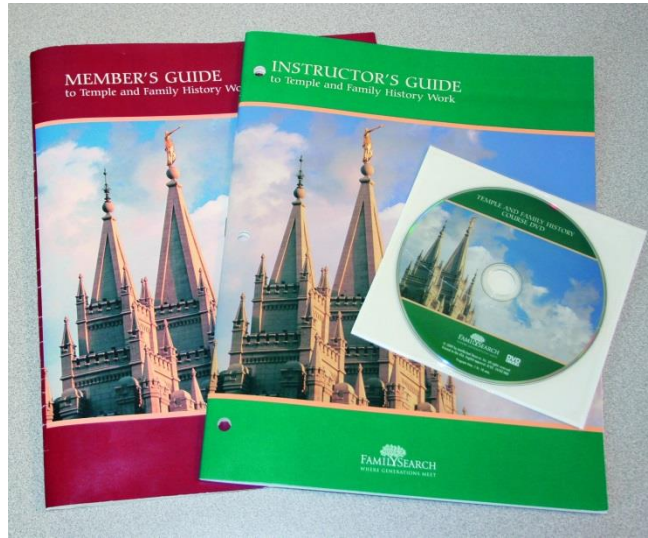
In the 1980s, family history consultants emerged as a significant local unit resource. David Mayfield, a department director, was inspired by the work of an acquaintance, Roger Williams, who thought more emphasis should be placed on name submission for temple work. Roger invited his congregation in a sacrament meeting talk to let him come into their homes for an hour a week, and he would guarantee the submission of an ancestor's name or, if he failed, buy them a root beer float. He and his assistants helped 50 families over two years to submit names.¹⁶³ The department began promoting the calling of ward family history consultants in 1988.¹⁶⁴ In the 21st century, the role of consultants became pivotal in the department's outreach to Church members. In 2003, a pilot project demonstrated that they were willing and able to promote family history work at the local level.¹⁶⁵ In recognition of their key role, the 2006 *Church Handbook of Instructions* stated, "The key to a successful family history program is family history consultants who meet with members and families individually to help them begin and continue their temple and family history work."¹⁶⁶

A significant innovation occurred in 2006 when the department began to communicate directly with consultants.¹⁶⁷ The department had been given the direction that it not to overburden priesthood leaders with a large amount of communication and training responsibility. Communication with consultants had always been through the priesthood channels, with limited effectiveness. The Church granted permission for the department to communicate with family history consultants through email. While priesthood leaders continued to be responsible for doctrinal instruction and leadership direction, department messages focused on genealogical skills and software assistance.¹⁶⁸ Consultants now received biweekly information on family history products, services, techniques, and events. By May 2008, 50,000 consultants had registered for this service.¹⁶⁹ To further train consultants, the department published the *Family History Consultant Handbook* in 2008, downloadable from FamilySearch Internet as a PDF file.¹⁷⁰

Elder D. Todd Christofferson described the vision of the ward consultant role in 2005, "With the help of the ward council, we would guide the consultant or consultants to work individually with specific members or families to help them in taking their first steps . . . in family history. The consultant might spend a few days or many days over several weeks helping. I imagine that in the course of a year we could help at least ten families. In five years, we could have a

corps of fifty families active at some level in family history and its attendant temple work. That to me would be a successful, well-run program.”¹⁷¹

Family History Lessons



Lesson Material for Members and Instructors Courtesy The Church

because procedures and tools changed frequently.¹⁷²

After an immense effort over several years and continual editing and revision, a new edition of *A Member's Guide* came out in 2007, delivered in temple districts receiving access to new FamilySearch. The department updated the manual during the rollout of the new system and finalized it in 2008.¹⁷³ Unlike the previous publication of the same name, it included high-level research guidance. The department translated the manual into 10 languages for distribution to a worldwide audience.¹⁷⁴ Equally important, it authored the *Instructor's Guide to Temple and Family History Work* and the *Temple and Family History Course DVD* to accompany it, providing a complete instructional package. The course materials introduced a new generation of Church members to updated curriculum on the family history mission of the Church. The *Member's Guide* also served as a self-instructional manual for any member seeking the basic skills and knowledge to accomplish this mission.¹⁷⁵

Training Area Presidencies and Seventies

Training high-level Church leaders provided another means to influence Church members. When called as Seventies, the administrative level below the First Presidency and Apostles, leaders usually had little experience in family history work. In 1994, department leadership discussed the problem that those in Area Presidencies, who are responsible to teach family history, did not have a general understanding of the work.¹⁷⁶ Area Presidencies, typically composed of Seventies, held executive leadership over stakes, wards, missions, and branches.

The department had the opportunity to influence members directly through classes in the Church's weekly Sabbath service known as Sunday School and in other meetings as determined by local leaders. The 1993 publication of *A Member's Guide to Temple and Family History Work* served as the official Sunday School manual until the delivery of new FamilySearch. Many instructors found *A Member's Guide* deficient in providing any type of research guidance. This absence reflected the difficulty of providing this type of guidance across the Church when record sources and techniques varied widely. A new manual was attempted but did not come to fruition

In April 1994, the Church permitted the department to train Area Presidencies.¹⁷⁷ It created a work group known as Priesthood and Area Support (PAS) that focused on coordinating family history work with the Area Presidencies.¹⁷⁸ As Executive Director of the department, Elder Monte J. Brough directed PAS to get the Area Presidents excited and informed about their duties without overwhelming them.¹⁷⁹ PAS advised and updated Area Presidencies on family history matters and trained area advisers when appointed (not an official position at the time) twice a year at a minimum, when they came to Salt Lake City to attend general conference.¹⁸⁰ The advisers reported to the Area Presidency and encouraged local priesthood leaders to support family history work and to call family history consultants in each Church unit.¹⁸¹ The PAS attempted to focus headquarters resources on filling worldwide family history needs.

In 1995, the Church temporarily suspended direct one-on-one contact with Area Presidencies.¹⁸² It dissembled the PAS unit on May 23, 1996 and international focus languished for a while.¹⁸³ In the meantime, through 2003, the department trained Seventies, including many who did not serve in Area Presidencies, in general gatherings.¹⁸⁴ For instance, in 1996 the department prepared a set of transparencies outlining the basic doctrine, responsibilities, and organization surrounding family history work for training this group during the October general conference that year.¹⁸⁵

Training of Area Presidencies resumed in 2005, when the Church permitted the department to teach Area Presidencies about the Unified System.¹⁸⁶ This opportunity continued through 2009.¹⁸⁷ When new FamilySearch was finally deployed that year, the department provided hands-on instruction to the Seventies over several weeks.¹⁸⁸ This culminated in a group demonstration held on September 17, 2009, at the Family History Library. The purpose was for these leaders to have a personal experience with the product and become ambassadors for the system when they spoke on stake conference assignments. The participants prepared over 200 names during the session for temple ordinances.¹⁸⁹ One found a name for which his family had been searching over decades. Commenting on this event, Elder Richard J. Maynes said, “That was a big day, where they saw the actual positive effects of what was going to be the future.”¹⁹⁰ A similar orientation was given to the general Relief Society presidency at their request in December 2009. The department was also permitted to invite members of Area Presidencies to receive personal assistance with the system through Worldwide Support area managers.¹⁹¹

Prophetic and Departmental Guidance

The messages of Church prophets and apostles propounded the doctrines for family history work and encouraged Church members to enjoy the spiritual benefit derived from this redemptive work. The eight-month presidency of Howard W. Hunter, which ended in March 1995, is remembered by many Church members because of the force and simplicity of his counsel that they be “temple worthy.” The presidency of Gordon B. Hinckley is remembered for the emphasis on temple building that gave many more temple worthy members the opportunity to receive temple blessings.

General Authorities often delivered their encouragement and vision in general conference addresses. Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve spoke in April 1998,

encouraging Church members to take advantage of the extensive resources provided by the department and the many technology advancements that simplified the work and generated a “harvest” of ancestral names.¹⁹² Elder Henry B. Eyring, also of the Quorum of the Twelve, reiterated this injunction in April 2005, saying, “There are more resources to search out your ancestors than there have ever been in the history of the world. The Lord has poured out knowledge about how to make that information available worldwide through technology that a few years ago would have seemed a miracle.”¹⁹³

President James E. Faust of the First Presidency underscored the impact of genealogy on the living to the young men of the Church in his general conference address of October 2003 during the priesthood session. He said, “It is a joy to become acquainted with our forebears who died long ago. Each of us has a fascinating family history. Finding your ancestors can be one of the most interesting puzzles you young men can work on.”¹⁹⁴ Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve spoke similarly in April 2010, saying, “Our inborn yearnings for family connections are fulfilled when we are linked to our ancestors through sacred ordinances of the temple.”¹⁹⁵ In October 2011, Elder David A. Bednar, also of the Quorum of the Twelve, invited the “young women, young men, and children of the rising generation” to become involved, adding that “as you participate in and love this holy work, you will be safeguarded in your youth and throughout your lives.”¹⁹⁶

Prophets and apostles have used other venues in addition to general conference. Speaking at the launch of FamilySearch Internet in 1999, President Gordon B. Hinckley underscored the spiritual underpinning of the work. He said, “Seeking to understand our family history can change our lives. It helps bring unity and cohesion to families. There is something about understanding the past that helps give our young people something to live up to, a legacy to respect.”¹⁹⁷

Department executive leaders have often taught members in various venues. Elder Marlin K. Jensen spoke at a Family History Library open house on January 26, 2005. Explaining the proper motivation for family history, he said: “Love is the central motivation for family history work. Identifying ancestors and performing saving ordinances for them are an expression of love. Engaging in family history and temple work certainly enlarges our souls, broadens our views regarding the welfare of our fellow men, and plants in our hearts a great love for our Heavenly Father.”¹⁹⁸ Repeating the family history message strengthens new Church members and motivates longer-term members to engage in family history work for the purpose of expanding our connection to ancestors through the service those in this mortal world can render them.

Church wide satellite broadcasts extended the ability of General Authorities (First Presidency, Apostles, and Seventies) to teach Church members. While the Church used satellite transmissions primarily for general Church broadcasts, such as general conference, the department used them from 1995 through 2000/¹⁹⁹ After 2000, it used streaming video over the Internet in lieu of satellite broadcasts.²⁰⁰

Headquarters Missionaries

Beside the role of missionaries in Acquisitions and Worldwide Support discussed previously in this history, is the missionary story at Family History Department headquarters in Salt Lake City. Initially an ancillary workforce, by 2010, they had been imbedded in the fabric of all headquarters operations, creating a mixed workforce of employees, missionaries, and volunteers. In 1981, the department created an organization for missionaries and volunteers serving in the Family History Library.²⁰¹ In 1990, the Church designated the organization as the Family History Mission. Over the years, the department has increased their responsibilities. In 1996, there were 392 full-time missionaries processing films in the Granite Mountain Records Vault; 186 served in library reference areas filling requests for photocopies, re-shelving and repairing books; and 171 served in the Church Office Building and the Joseph Smith Memorial Building, testing new software, circulating films to centers, and auditing extraction work and Ancestral File submissions, among other tasks. In 1999, the number of full-time missionaries serving rose from 6 to 370, and the number of Church-service missionaries, serving part-time, increased from 300 to 685.²⁰²

The missionary force evolved over time. The full-time missionary count rose above 400 in 2000 and remained there for the early part of the decade. The number of Church-service missionaries during the same period exceeded 1,000, peaking at 1,318 in 2003. These counts included about 300 missionaries serving in the Church History Department during the period.²⁰³ In October 2003, the Church added young missionaries to the mix as five young men entered the Family History Mission. Many of them had challenging health issues that prevented them from serving a regular proselytizing mission. Young women joined the missionary force as well.²⁰⁴ In 2006 the mission absorbed sixty missionaries serving at Church headquarters in other departments.²⁰⁵ By September 2008, 1,200 missionaries served at Church headquarters.²⁰⁶ These numbers were sustained over time. In 2011, the average number of missionaries serving was still 1,200, with approximately 877 serving in the Family History Department. Those serving in this capacity rendered 813,800 hours of service that year.²⁰⁷

The transition to a mixed workforce at headquarters became a reality first in the Family History Library in the effort to serve novices, as mentioned earlier in this chapter. The missionary complement in the library in September 2007 consisted of 500 Church-service missionaries and 180 full-time missionaries, for a total of 680 missionaries. These missionaries worked along with only 100 employees. Missionaries took over many facets of the employees' key roles. To facilitate coordination between the volunteer and employee staff, each unit's missionary zone leader served as an assistant to the staff manager.²⁰⁸

Missionaries worked in many other department units at headquarters in addition to the library. In late 2006, a group of missionaries serving in Orem began scanning thousands of books from the library for the Family History Archive.²⁰⁹ Commenting on the service of missionaries in the digital processing center in the Church Office Building, which handled millions of images from around the world; Herb White stated in 2007, "I can honestly say that without these Church-service missionaries that we have working in our area, we couldn't do the job." He was especially impressed when he arrived at work one day to find Elder Troy Ogden already there.

Elder Ogden explained, “I woke up about 5:30 this morning and realized I had done something wrong, so I got dressed, came in, and fixed the problem.”²¹⁰ In 2008, missionaries in the Joseph Smith Memorial Building eliminated a backlog of over a thousand inquiries concerning



Church Service Missionaries of the Family and Church History Mission 2005 Courtesy The Church

ordinance issues in new FamilySearch that had overwhelmed the paid staff.²¹¹ These missionaries continued in 2010 to handle over a thousand inquiries a week.

The commitment and devotion of the missionaries was rewarded as they developed new skills and achieved results they could not have imagined before their missions. The average age of senior missionaries in 2007 was 71 years old. Most came without significant computer skills. President Ronald Halverson said in December 2007 that “the Spirit of the Lord magnifies the missionaries as they acquire the knowledge and skills needed to fulfill their assignments.”²¹² When asked about his eight years of service in a particular assignment, Elder Howard Cheney responded, “I think the thing I’ve learned most on my mission—the reason I love it so much—is that every day I do things that I know I can’t do. That’s only because it’s the Lord’s work and He uses us as tools. If we are converted to the work and do everything we can, then He lets us go beyond our own abilities to accomplish things that He needs accomplishing, because we’re all He’s got.”²¹³

Proselytizing Missionaries

The mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ to all of God’s children. This mission is carried out on three fronts—perfecting members of the Church, teaching prospective members, and serving the deceased through family history and temple worship. Family history has the power to touch lives, interesting those who

experience its power to investigate the full program of the Church. During the 1990s, the Missionary Department taught missionaries to use the Church's emphasis on family history to attract investigators, retain converts, and activate members. The Family History Department was more an observer than an instigator in this program. Still, this effort provides an important perspective on how the different aspects of the mission of the Church—to perfect members, to teach prospective members, and to serve the deceased—are aligned.

In September 1995, Family History Department leadership received a letter about how convert retention rates in the Chile Santiago North Mission increased when new members filled out a family group sheet and attended the temple to perform baptisms and confirmation soon after their own conversion.²¹⁴ This result was confirmed in 1997, when a Church headquarters research unit conducted a telephone poll of members from five stakes in which family history had been used to strengthen convert retention. The researchers concluded that there is a positive association between participation in family history activities and Sunday church attendance.²¹⁵

In early 1997, the leadership of the Missionary and Family History Departments conferred on joint initiatives.²¹⁶ Later that year, the Family History Department offered its support to a Missionary Department proposal on family history training of missionaries.²¹⁷ The department learned in 1998 that the Missionary Department was committed to using family history as part of the missionary effort and that mission presidents would receive training in family history as it related to missionary work.²¹⁸ In November 1998, Elder D. Todd Christofferson informed Church leadership that all missionaries called to serve in North America received a basic course in family history training.²¹⁹

After receiving a commission to institute a family history proselytizing program in his California Sacramento Mission, President Richard Smoot Nixon received the visit of Sister Anne Allred, who served in the mission from 1997 to 1998. She told the president that a blessing she had received from a patriarch mentioned that as a missionary she would be engaged in all three aspects of the mission of the Church. The president said she was an answer to his prayers and commissioned her to develop the family history program. When she asked what to do, he said, "Just do it." She discovered that members were much more willing to engage their friends in family history work as a precursor to preaching than to approach them directly with an invitation to be taught about the gospel of Jesus Christ. She trained all of the sisters in the program. On more than one occasion, the sisters would begin to weep during the training. Upon inquiry about their weeping, they would respond with comments such as, "While I was doing this, I just had an overwhelming feeling of a specific [ancestor's presence]," or "I know that I need to be doing this."²²⁰

At the end of 1999, a report to the Family History Department leadership highlighted a few methods used to include family history in missionary work. It noted that some missionaries: (1) worked with new converts to help them take a name to the temple within a month of their baptism, helping the converts feel the spirit of the temple, (2) focused on family history during the initial contact, obtaining enough information to compile a personalized family history

report as a lead-in to missionary discussions, (3) set up family history booths at fairs, festivals, and other community activities.²²¹ Another review of this effort a year later revealed a common thread in the results of these and other programs. The programs did not result in a dramatic



Curriculum for Missionary Teaching Courtesy Candy Steinhorst

touch the lives of those investigating the Church. The department contributed to developing the instruction. Missionaries were asked to investigate their own ancestry prior to their missions. They also received multimedia instruction during their missionary training and additional in-service courses.²²³

Staff Training

At the beginning of the 21st century, the department devoted significant resources to staff training and development. Developing staff skills and keeping staff informed and aligned with the department strategy occurred on the individual and group levels. The department funded learning opportunities both for technologists and genealogists. The department approved coursework benefited the employee as much as the employer, with some employees getting MBAs or genealogical certifications with department assistance. Jay Verkler observed, “Culturally what that . . . meant is that if employees really wanted to step up and use the resources, they could go places.”²²⁴

In addition to individual programs, the department held meetings for all employees and missionaries to keep them apprised of new initiatives and the progress on the efforts already underway. Richard Turley initiated State of the Department meetings in 2001, based on a practice he had already instituted in the Church History Department. The sessions allowed the leadership early in the year to account for the previous year’s goals and to establish a vision and new objectives for the next year. When technical and business content became too much for one session, the department split it into two annual meetings, a gathering with a spiritual focus and

increase in baptisms, but they strengthened the commitment of converts and aided in their retention.²²² For the next decade the role of family history in missionary work received less attention as the department improved its products and services.

By 2010, the content and effectiveness of department systems and content had matured. The Family History Department suggested to the Missionary Department that a curriculum be developed for missionaries to take advantage of these programs to

a gathering with a business focus.²²⁵ Additionally, it instituted a third meeting in the fall to focus more in depth on important topics. This practice continued at least through 2011.

During the devotional gathering, members of the Temple and Family History Executive Council would normally address department staff and missionaries. The December 2004 address of Henry B. Eyring, at the time a member of the Twelve, exemplifies the guidance in these meetings. He assured those attending that what the work in the department really mattered. He noted that those in the spirit world are aware of us and that those who serve could succeed beyond their fondest dreams, as long as they worked for the Savior and for others.²²⁶

The department held special meetings on other occasions. In September 2002, President Boyd K. Packer, who at the time was Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve, addressed the department after the 2002 reorganization of the department and on the eve of extensive new technological development. He said he rarely used the word *absolutely*, but with regard to temple and family history work, it was absolutely necessary to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and he declared that it mattered profoundly. He noted that over the years he had seen the department get off track. He warned that those who use computers “get excited over things that don’t matter profoundly.” The objective should be to keep things simple so that an elderly person unversed in technology would be served as well as those having only pencil and paper.²²⁷

Supporting the Individual

Guarding against the possible excesses of technology has continued to be the desire of department executive leadership. Commenting on this theme, Elder D. Todd Christofferson said in 2005, “One of the challenges with technology is ensuring that it does not become the master but remains the servant. Technology can be a marvelous tool, an essential tool. . . . That being said, however, we still have to be cautious that we develop and use the right technology for the right need. Just because something is possible doesn’t mean that we should do it, or that we should adopt a certain technology just because it is there. President Hinckley repeatedly cautions us not to let these things become ‘toys.’ In other words, we must control technology, not be driven by it.”²²⁸

The human side of assisting people one-on-one marks department efforts over the last 16 years to support the genealogical community and Church members worldwide. The department has taken advantage of new digital technology to reach out by means unavailable until the modern age. Personal assistance is a key component of a three-fold effort that includes the compiled lineages of the Family Tree as well as the indexes and images of historical records. The tools are not as important as the purpose behind creating and using them, giving Church members and others an unprecedented capacity to identify their ancestors, record their information, know them, and provide them with eternal blessings.

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- ³"Submitting Names to the Temple and Challenges to Doing Family History Research," June 2002, internal FHD document.
- ⁴"Promoting Member Efforts to Submit Names to the Temple," August 21, 2000, internal FHD document.
- ⁵"Cross-Cultural Challenges to Family History Support: Moving into the 21st Century," Research Information Division report, December 29, 2000.
- ⁶James B. Allen, Jessie L. Embry, Kahlile B. Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1995), 283.
- ⁷Wayne J. Metcalfe, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, September 3, 2008, 6.
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- ⁹Executive Director's meeting minutes, March 14, 2000.
- ¹⁰Executive Director's meeting minutes, August 31, 1999; also February 8, 2000; April 15, 2003.
- ¹¹Jay L. Verkler, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Portola Valley, California, September 5–12, 2012, 10.
- ¹²Executive Director's meeting minutes, January 6, 2004; also January 13, 2004.
- ¹³"Family History Support," September 26, 2007, internal FHD PowerPoint, slide 15.
- ¹⁴Don R. Anderson, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, September 30, 2008, 4.
- ¹⁵Family and Church History Department annual report, 2000, 14.
- ¹⁶"News and Press," September 17, 2012, web page at <https://familysearch.org/news>. This is the same number as reported in 2009 and 2010.
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- ¹⁸*Family History Centers Memorandum* 23, no. 2 (June 2002): 3.
- ¹⁹Executive Director's meeting minutes, April 11, 1995.
- ²⁰*Family History Centers Memorandum* 19, no. 4 (December 1998): 1.
- ²¹*Family History Centers Memorandum*, January 24, 2007 (4th Quarter 2006): 1A.
- ²²Dennis Meldrum, telephone conversation with Kahlile Mehr, March 16, 2011.
- ²³*Memorandum From: Leadership Team*, January, February, and March 1995.
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- ²⁵Dennis Meldrum, telephone conversation with Kahlile Mehr, March 16, 2011.
- ²⁶*Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 284–85.
- ²⁷*Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 286; *Family History Centers Memorandum* 18, no. 1 (April 1997): 1.
- ²⁸*Family History Centers Memorandum*, February 22, 2006 (1st Quarter 2006): 2.
- ²⁹Executive Director's meeting minutes, November 8, 2005.
- ³⁰Steven Fox, email, March 28, 2011.
- ³¹*Family History Centers Memorandum* 22, no. 1 (February 2001): 1; also vol. 24, no. 2 (March 2003): 4.
- ³²*Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 286.
- ³³Karolia Hansen, telephone conversation, March 22, 2011; Don Anderson to Jay Verkler, email, September 25, 2012.
- ³⁴Executive Director's meeting minutes, December 6, 1994.
- ³⁵Executive Director's meeting minutes, May 14, 1996.
- ³⁶Executive Director's meeting minutes, October 19, 1999.
- ³⁷Executive Director's meeting minutes, December 7, 1999.
- ³⁸Executive Director's meeting minutes, June 27, 2000; also December 5, 2000; January 23, 2001; and September 10, 2002.
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- ⁴²Executive Director's meeting minutes, November 28, 1995; also January 20, 1998.
- ⁴³Executive Director's meeting minutes, February 9, 1999; *Family History Centers Memorandum* 20, no. 3 (September 1999): 3.
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- ⁴⁹Jay L. Verkler, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, October 6, 2011, 5; *Family History Centers Memorandum*, March 9, 2005 (1st Quarter): 2.
- ⁵⁰Family and Church History Department annual report, 2004, 13; also 2005, 11.
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- ⁵²Executive Director's meeting minutes, December 5, 2008.
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- ⁶⁴Rose Pierson, email, March 10, 2011.
- ⁶⁵"Inmates use LDS Family History centers to find their pasts and help others," *Deseret News*, March 21, 2009, B1, B4.
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- ⁶⁷Anonymous former prisoner to Howard Cheney, (2006).
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- ⁷³Don R. Anderson, oral history, 2.
- ⁷⁴Jay L. Verkler, oral history, October 6, 2011, 3.
- ⁷⁵Jay L. Verkler, oral history, October 6, 2011, 8.
- ⁷⁶Executive Director's meeting minutes, March 4, 2003.
- ⁷⁷Family and Church History Department annual report, 2003, 8; Penney R. Devey, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, September 11, 2008, 2-3.
- ⁷⁸Keith Withington, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Sutton Coldfield, England, January 26, 2009, 2.
- ⁷⁹Family and Church History Department annual report, 2004, 13, 15.
- ⁸⁰Sonja Nishimoto, telephone conversation, March 23, 2011.
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Chapter 4: Collaboration and Marketing

The department is not alone in its commitment to document human ancestry, nor does it have the resources or intent to do so on its own. The entities sponsoring this effort include governmental organizations, public and private institutions, and businesses. While specific objectives vary among the different entities, they pursue a common goal of assisting individuals and families to discover their past. The department has chosen to collaborate with everyone in this market space. Likewise, it has promoted its resources so that those entering this field of endeavor will want to take advantage of its products and services. The department seeks to be a leader in the nonprofit arena and engender collaboration with all market segments. As it adjusted to the challenges and opportunities of technological development, the department reinvented itself as an organization, implementing a strategy that it consistently pursued from 2002 to 2012.

In 1996, department leadership questioned the position of the department in the leadership of the genealogical community.¹ As recounted to Stephen Kendall, Elder Monte Brough, the department's Executive Director at the time, had an impression when awakened during a storm one night that the department had lost its leadership role. He reenergized department leadership to focus on the delivery of FamilySearch Internet and the Pedigree Resource File.² In the interim, Internet entities began to offer images and indexes of original records. In 2000, the feeling persisted that technology had passed by the department, but the "sleeping giant" had reawakened and readied itself to move forward in a new way.³ Since then, the department has broadened its base of influence by engaging others in a joint effort to provide the resources not only to Church members but to the genealogical community worldwide. It contributed to this effort by supporting the PBS Ancestors series 1 and then Ancestors series 2 at the turn of the century. It increasingly fostered cooperation with commercial and noncommercial institutions. Only out of the starting blocks at the beginning of the century, the department began to sprint with its outreach and marketing during the first decade of the 21st century.

Digital Delivery in the Genealogical Community

In 1893, Church president Wilford Woodruff envisioned the worldwide interest and involvement in family history. In dedicating the Salt Lake Temple, he prayed, "And, as Thou has inclined the hearts of many who have not yet entered into covenant with Thee to search out their progenitors, and in so doing they have traced the ancestry of many of Thy Saints, we pray Thee that Thou wilt increase this desire in their bosoms, that they may in this way aid in the accomplishment of Thy work. Bless them, we pray Thee, in their labors, that they may not fall into errors in preparing their genealogies; and furthermore, we ask Thee to open before them new avenues of information, and place in their hands the records of the past, that their work may not only be correct but complete also."⁴ In this dedicatory prayer, he requested that those not in the Church be assisted as well as those in the Church to accomplish the tracing of ancestral lineages. Indeed, at the beginning of the 20th century, the genealogical community pioneered many aspects of delivering the records of the past and assisting the common person in pursuing ancestral lineages.

In 2000, the Internet had begun to become standard fare in popular culture worldwide. In 1992, people surfed the Internet using a gopher, lists of documents, and links to other gophers.⁵ With the creation of the Netscape web browser in 1994 and the Internet Explorer browser in 1995, the Internet entered the public consciousness. In December 1998, Ancestry launched its website. The Social Security Index was the largest database on the site at the time.⁶ The site generated a million registered users within 140 days, demonstrating public interest in genealogy.⁷ A poll conducted in 2000 by Maritz Marketing Research showed that 60 percent of the American population had an interest in genealogy.⁸ Building on this interest, Ancestry published indexes and images of U.S. census records. Similarly, in 2002, the Public Record Office in England announced the digitization and index to the 1901 census of England and Wales, containing 32 million names.⁹ The first decade of the 21st century saw the creation of commercially viable online genealogy businesses, with such vendors as Ancestry in the United States and Brightsolid (Findmypast) in the United Kingdom. At the end of 2011, other major players in the field included Archives.com, MyHeritage, and Find A Grave.¹⁰

In 2004, the popularity of the BBC series *Who Do You Think You Are?* in the United Kingdom and the successor NBC series in the United States in 2010 underscored the power of family history to touch lives. More importantly for the future of genealogy, these media events and others continued to nudge the public's perception of genealogy away from that of a hobby for little old ladies to a legitimate pastime for everyone. The advertising of commercial companies aided this flowering of genealogical interest.¹¹

The census records of many Scandinavian countries were indexed and delivered online. Many European archives started to deliver genealogical content digitally over the Internet, both inspiring and feeding the public interest in pursuing ancestral lineages. Vendors as well as noncommercial entities began to flood the Internet with images and indexes, transporting the libraries and archives of the world to the living rooms of those seeking their ancestral lineages.

PBS Ancestors Series 1 and 2



Ancestors PBS Series Courtesy The Church

During a season of sparse financial resources in the Family History Department, BYU Television came to the forefront with two family history series that captivated a large audience. On January 1, 1997, PBS began broadcasting the first episode of *Ancestors*, with nine more episodes to follow.¹² The series had minimal impact on patronage at family history centers.¹³ However, the overwhelmingly positive response to the first series led to the production of 13 episodes in a second series that premiered on June 1, 2000.

The department became heavily involved in authoring supplemental materials that could be obtained through the broadcast website to assist people inspired by the broadcast to begin tracing their family lines.¹⁴ The Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS) became part of the marketing effort, publicizing the series to PBS stations around the country.¹⁵ The series covered the basics of research sources and techniques. The crowning jewel of the second *Ancestors* series was expert instruction provided by some of the best-known and widely respected experts in the field of genealogical research. David Rencher, department employee and president of the Federation of Genealogical Societies at the time, predicted, “Not only will the series improve the skills of genealogists, but it will also show those who’ve never done family history what an adventure it can be.”¹⁶ A premier PBS station in the country, Boston’s WGBH, complimented KBYU, saying they had raised the bar of excellence to a whole new level. It was the first program since *Roots* in 1976 to publicize family history to the nation.¹⁷

Media Reporting

Sporadically during the 20th century but frequently during the 21st century, the media came to the department, raising its profile and publicizing its services. In 1994, the department’s centennial year, the *Today Show*, the lead news program of the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) on weekday mornings, aired a segment on May 23, 1994, that focused on the Church’s interest in and support of family history work.¹⁸ Before the decade ended, the *Today Show* again spotlighted the department. Matt Lauer interviewed Richard E. Turley in early May 1999 about how to do family history work.¹⁹ Later in May, Katie Couric interviewed Turley just after the public launch of FamilySearch Internet. Turley was in Washington, D.C., for the launch when he received a call from the Church’s Public Affairs asking if he could be at the *Today Show* the following morning, which he agreed to do. This type of media attention swelled the public interest and contributed to the great popularity of the site when launched.²⁰

From 1999 to 2005, the department tracked the media coverage of the department. In the early part of the period, coverage was significant. The release of FamilySearch Internet generated over 500 newspaper and magazine articles and more than 300 stories on radio and television.²¹ In 2001, the release of Ellis Island and Freedman’s Bank Records generated coverage in over 1,000 newspapers and magazines.²² The department did not release products from 2002 to 2005 while it developed new FamilySearch. During those four years, the number of newspapers and magazines covering stories was estimated at over 180 stories per year.²³ The department did not compile statistics annually for subsequent years but did so only for specific events.

Marketing

During the first decade of the 21st century, the department began to take seriously the idea of reaching everyone with genealogical interest or possible interest, not only in the Church but also in the wider genealogical community. At the beginning of the century, only a small percentage of the Church membership engaged in genealogy while genealogical interest outside the Church flourished. The department desired to reach out to both these groups so they knew the value of genealogical resources in the department and that they were freely available to them.²⁴

To accomplish this desire, the department began considering in 2004 the creation of a worldwide genealogical resource, “consolidating various brand and message efforts in family history to attract Church members and nonmembers to the process of finding their ancestors.”²⁵ The department sought its own unique niche that avoided duplicating the work of others and relied on attracting the support of others because of the department’s altruistic motives.²⁶ In essence, it adopted a non-profit cooperative model to establish its position in the family history marketplace.²⁷ The department did this by consolidating all department products under the single brand name of FamilySearch in 2004 and to use FamilySearch as the department’s corporate identity in 2008. Under this identity, it developed partnerships with both commercial and noncommercial entities, built a volunteer infrastructure, acquired rights to freely distribute digital images, and publicized its efforts.²⁸

After the adoption of the new brand in 2004, the department engaged in a marketing effort to raise the public consciousness of FamilySearch products and services. Department leadership knew that it would be years before department products were ready to engage a broad consumer audience, but it also knew the importance of developing the communication and marketing competencies to carry the message. Consistent messaging was a significant component of the marketing plan. Beginning with the 2005 Federation of Genealogical Societies conference in Salt Lake City, the department issued lists of messages to be propounded at the conference. The 2005 sheet covered such items as the release of FamilySearch indexing, the Family History Archive at BYU, and the role of FamilySearch as the largest provider of free family history and genealogy resources in the world.²⁹ The 2006 public message sheet included the news that the microfilms at the Granite Mountain Records Vault were being digitized to improve access to all.³⁰ In 2010, the department’s told all employees and missionaries that they were FamilySearch ambassadors to the Church and public.³¹

FamilySearch indexing provides an example of a product fitting the plan. It had a profound impact on how the department interacted with the genealogical community. Before digital indexing, extraction had been done mostly in-house, with the exception of the 1881 British census and the Civil War Soldiers project. With the development of FamilySearch indexing, this work could be done by almost anyone almost anywhere, without regard to Church membership.³² It illustrated the department’s altruistic endeavor and engaged everyone in serving each other. Other efforts emerged from the plan as noted later: the genealogical ecosystem, the platform strategy, and the Records Access Program.³³

Nonprofit Collaboration

With limited resources, the department could not do everything alone. Jay Verkler described its role at the fall business meeting in 2008 to foster a genealogical ecosystem, that is, being a partner with the greater genealogical community in jointly accomplishing the tracing of ancestral lineages. Socially, this meant forging agreements with other genealogical entities to digitize and provide access to records. Technologically, it meant enabling others to create software as an extension of the FamilySearch.org platform. Ordinary people could then benefit from the conclusions and data derived by enthusiasts and institutions from records and delivered simply to them by technologists.³⁴ As a platform, FamilySearch.org served to enable

the whole genealogical community to do new things they could not do otherwise, converting it from a private asset for the Church to a public forum for all.³⁵ This product rendered substance to the earlier theoretical construct—the Research Model for the Ordinary Member, discussed in chapter 2. To some degree, the ecosystem mentioned by Verkler already functioned in cooperative efforts forged earlier in the decade with genealogical societies, archives, and professional groups. What follows is a sampling of the efforts the department made with other nonprofit organizations.

At the national level, the department fostered cooperation with genealogical societies in several ways. Department staff members served as leaders. For example, David Rencher served multiple terms as president, board member, treasurer, national conference chair, program chair,



Federation of Genealogical Societies' Recognition 2011 Courtesy FGS

and National Archives liaison for the Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS). FGS awarded him the Rabbi Malcolm H. Stern Humanitarian Award in 2005, the highest recognition granted by FGS and presented only occasionally to exceptional individuals whose lifetime contributions were monumental.³⁶ Department staff members presented at many genealogical society conferences. For instance, staff members gave 78 presentations at the 2005 FGS conference held in Salt Lake City, and in lesser but still substantial numbers they gave presentations at the conference when held elsewhere.³⁷ In 2011, FGS recognized the department for their long-term commitment and service.

Cooperation with archives both nationally and internationally permitted the department to improve access to records. For example, in 2003, the West Virginia State Archives accepted digital images from the department and agreed to reimburse the department to index the state's vital records. In turn, the department obtained digital rights to the images and permission to show the index on the FamilySearch website as well.³⁸ In 2006, the department entered into an

agreement with the National Archives of Sweden to digitize department films of Swedish records and to cooperate in indexing them in return for digital rights to the images and index access for Church members and family history center users.³⁹ It took three years, from 2006 to 2009, to scan 23,000 microfilm rolls.⁴⁰ At the conclusion of the scanning, the two partners announced the initial effort to index 400 million names from 200 years of recorded Swedish history.⁴¹ The department later grouped these types of projects together under the Records Access Program.

FamilySearch indexing opened up the possibility of cooperative indexing. The cooperating entity coordinated all of the indexing for a record collection. As an example, the department and the province of Nova Scotia, Canada, delivered in 2007 an index to one million births, marriages, and deaths for the province. The department provided the scanned images, and volunteers enlisted by the archive indexed the images. The archive noted the necessity of cooperation to make the index possible.⁴² By 2008, cooperative indexing projects were being pursued with the National Archives of Belgium, the Arkansas Genealogical Society, the Genealogical Association of Nova Scotia, the Indiana Genealogy Society, the Ohio Genealogical Society, and the New England Historic Genealogical Society.⁴³ Indexing the Norwegian 1875 census became a joint project in 2009 of the Family History Department, the University of Tromsø, and DIS-Norge, Norway's largest genealogical association.

The department cooperated over time with a wide range of professional groups to benefit the genealogical community. At the international level, it obtained membership in the International Council on Archives (ICA) in 1976.⁴⁴ Through the associations made possible by its membership, the department developed excellent working relationships with many archivists worldwide. In 1994, Reynolds Cahoon, the managing director of the department at the time, served on the ICA Automation Committee, promoting the adoption of standards for data exchange.⁴⁵ The department became a voting member in 2008, a particular honor for a non-archival institution. The department led the effort to create the Genealogy and Local History Section of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), founded in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1997.⁴⁶ In a novel arrangement with the National Association of Government Archive and Records Administrators (NAGARA), the department funded a grant awarded through NAGARA for digitization projects by local governmental agencies. The 2008 award went to Summit County, Ohio, to digitally preserve and provide fee online access to birth, marriage, and death records.⁴⁷

Commercial Collaboration

The department also collaborated with commercial entities. It decided to work with commercial vendors in 1995, when the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve approved this type of cooperation.⁴⁸ On the forefront of this new possibility was Progeny Software out of Nova Scotia, Canada. Ray Madsen, product manager for Personal Ancestral File software, sought to solve the dilemma of developing printer drivers for PAF. He called an acquaintance, Pierre Cloutier at Progeny, to solve the problem. Cloutier and Bob Thomas came to Salt Lake City and met with department staff. Department staff members were so impressed that they took the visitors to visit Richard Turley, the managing director of the department, and on the next day they took

the visitors to see Elder Monte Brough, the Executive Director of the department. With a handshake, they concluded the deal to create PAF Companion, still being sold in 2011. Progeny Software later supplied the viewer for Pedigree Resource File and the Freedman's Bank compact discs. In Madsen's words, "I cannot emphasize [enough] how good they were to work with."⁴⁹

The department pursued relationships with major technology providers. Ransom Love, who came to work in the department after 25 years of experience in the high-tech industry, directed the effort.⁵⁰ In charge of the Strategic Relationships Division, he would explain the mission of Family Search together with Jay Verkler, departmental executives. They witnessed a change come over some of the executives of these companies. Love noted that "Not only were they interested in our business from an economic standpoint, but they became interested in the business from a personal standpoint." Because of this rapport, the department successfully formed close strategic and working relationships with hardware, software, and Internet companies.⁵¹ Some of the companies with which they established these relationships were HP, Dell, Oracle, Sun, Equinix, VMware, and IBM. The relationships also allowed the department to chart its own path and to avoid unintended competition or friction. The department became a testing ground for evaluating products and reporting product defects back to technology providers in an environment of cooperation.⁵²

Along with the relationships it established, the department designed FamilySearch.org to be a platform to deliver content in cooperation with commercial entities. It established the Affiliate Vendor Program to provide a mechanism for genealogical software to connect with the system. In 2006, Ancestral Quest, Generation Maps, Legacy, PAF Insight, and RootsMagic participated in the program.⁵³ They created software that could search and download information from new FamilySearch for their software users. Other types of affiliate vendors offered varying services. WorldVitalRecords provided access to genealogical sources; LivingGenealogy.com allowed sharing stories, photos, documents, and life histories; and Family Pursuit facilitated data management, collaboration, communications, and revision through a web-based platform.⁵⁴ Some vendors offered their programs for free to family history centers.⁵⁵ The underlying concept was that through this cooperation, the results of new FamilySearch and the affiliate both improved, enhancing the effectiveness of the whole genealogical endeavor.⁵⁶

The department began developing a relationship with Ancestry (then known as MyFamily.com) in 2000. In 2001, Ancestry borrowed the department's microfilms of the 1900 and 1910 United States censuses to digitize and index the images.⁵⁷ In 2002, Ancestry obtained the index to the 1880 United States census and 1881 British census from the department, with the agreement to publish these for free with the images on their website.⁵⁸ At the end of 2002, Ancestry provided free use of Ancestry.com in family history centers as an introduction to their services.⁵⁹ This arrangement ended in 2007, and Ancestry cut off free access, requiring a subscription fee to renew the agreement for the Family History Library and centers.⁶⁰ However, before the end of the year, Ancestry reached a new agreement to provide access to most of its materials to the Family History Library and regional centers, though not for free.⁶¹ The agreement was expanded in January 2011 to all family history centers.⁶² In 2008, these two organizations agreed

to exchange images and indexes for all U.S. censuses.⁶³ They signed a similar exchange agreement late in 2008 with respect to Canadian censuses and another for the Mexico 1930 census and Mexico border crossings.⁶⁴ The 2011 agreement included an exchange of 150 million indexed names from vital records and 10 million images. Ancestry also funded the scanning of films in the Granite Mountain Vault.⁶⁵ Many of the indexes from these agreements were available on FamilySearch.org in early 2011, with the delivery of the images still pending.

The leading genealogical vendors in 2000 were Genealogy.com, Ancestry, and Heritage Quest.⁶⁶ Heritage Quest allowed free access to its United States census indexes at the Family History Library, available to other libraries only by subscription.⁶⁷ Ancestry eventually bought Genealogy.com. Later, new vendors appeared: Footnote (also known as iArchives) in the United States and the Origins Network in England, though Ancestry acquired Footnote in 2010. In 2011, the list of leading vendors included Inflection (Archives.com), MyHeritage, and Brightsolid.

When it deployed new FamilySearch, the department extended an affiliate relationship to all major commercial vendors. In 2008, it announced multiple major agreements. Footnote agreed to index images provided by the department for Civil War pension files.⁶⁸ Also in 2008, findmypast, owned by Brightsolid, and the Origins Network agreed to share indexes and images with the department for British censuses from 1851 to 1901 and provide free access to both at family history centers.⁶⁹ The department built a strong relationship with Brightsolid in 2010 and 2011. Exchanges were concluded for digitizing hundreds of millions of images and swapping United States census indexes for British vital records indexes, Welsh parish registers and vital records indexes, and Scottish censuses. Brightsolid also agreed to fund the scanning of vault microfilms. Also, the department concluded scanning agreements and exchanges with Archives.com and Youwho.⁷⁰

Commercial organizations benefit from scanning agreements because the department can provide images from their microfilm collections for much less than it would cost the organizations to digitize original documents. In some cases, the commercial organizations provide an index for FamilySearch that links to the images on their site, driving traffic there and increasing awareness of their services.⁷¹ Archives.com and Brightsolid each embarked on close software development with the department for sharing family-linked data and developing new genealogical data standards. These relationships increased the commitment of the commercial community to share genealogical resources, an example being the 1940 United States census. Though the project did not come to fruition until 2012, cooperative planning with several organizations began in 2011.⁷²

Records Access Program

The department formally implemented the Records Access Program (later known as Collaborative Record Solutions) in 2007 to collaborate with archives and commercial organizations to provide greater access to records at low cost to the department.⁷³ It created a program to share records and create indexes through partnerships that allowed a fair exchange

of value.⁷⁴ Eventually, the program adopted a motto, “More records more quickly to more people.”⁷⁵

Under this program, the department offered services to archives and other record custodians who wanted to digitize, index, publish, and preserve their collections, with the objective of ensuring a flood of new indexes and images to FamilySearch.org.⁷⁶ These services promoted public access to the records.⁷⁷ The first fruit of the new program was the digitization and indexing of the Revolutionary War pension records in cooperation with the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and Footnote.⁷⁸ Later in 2007, NARA signed an agreement with the department to digitize millions of court, military, land, and other government records of genealogical significance. The first output of this pilot effort was Civil War widow pension application files, digitized by the department and indexed by Footnote.⁷⁹ Cooperative deals were made with national archives in Italy and Sweden and initiated elsewhere as well, for example in Latin America. In Venezuela, the Catholic archdiocese of Merida collaborated with the department to acquire records by providing room and board gratis for missionary camera operators and engaging local seminary students to index the records. The results were first published in 2011. In 2012, the program spread to other archdioceses in Venezuela. Also in 2011, the Guatemala civil registry archive provided camera operators to capture images.⁸⁰

Another initiative of the Records Access Program aimed at helping archives publish and preserve the images of their records on their own. Most archives did not have the means to create and handle digital images. This endeavor of the Records Access Program was still in the formative stages in 2009.⁸¹ In that year, the department requested money to create software to enable an archive to digitize, view, and publish its own records in exchange for allowing FamilySearch access to the data. The department termed it the “pilot reading room and simple publishing solution.”⁸² The solution used cloud computing, in which software and storage resources are shared over the Internet or on some other network. With the availability of cloud resources, hardware and software are easy to plug in, install, and use. By the end of 2011, pilots functioned at 20 sites.⁸³

Jay Verkler summarized the changes in the department’s relationship with archives and record custodians. Whereas the relationship with archives at the beginning of the century focused on how the department might acquire images and publication rights, he observed, “the conversations we have now are much more around how can [their] records become available in the ways that [they] want them so [they] can protect” their own control over records and so they can fulfill their responsibility for public access and records preservation.⁸⁴

Genealogical Conferences

When the Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS) held its conference in Salt Lake City in 2000, Richard E. Turley, the managing director at the time, gave a keynote address entitled, “The Family History Library: Its Past, Present, and Future in Identifying and Linking the World Family.” It constituted the first major summary of department activities for a general audience. Using the metaphor of a jet pilot ready for takeoff, he concluded, “Buckle your seatbelts, and

hang on tight.”⁸⁵ The department had begun to reassert its contribution to the genealogical community.

The department sought to reassert its leadership by becoming more visible and present at genealogical conferences. In 1996, the department built and deployed a big booth, measuring 20 by 40 feet.⁸⁶ Manned displays became a regular feature every year at the conference exhibition halls of the FGS, the National Genealogical Society (NGS), and, beginning in 2005, the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS). The department had a booth at the first Family History Expo, held in St. George, Utah, in 2005.⁸⁷ The department continued to field displays at subsequent expos and similar events. It also began sponsoring displays at international conferences, most recently at the 2009–2011 “Who Do You Think You Are” conference in London, England. The department planned to sponsor at over thirty conferences during 2011.⁸⁸

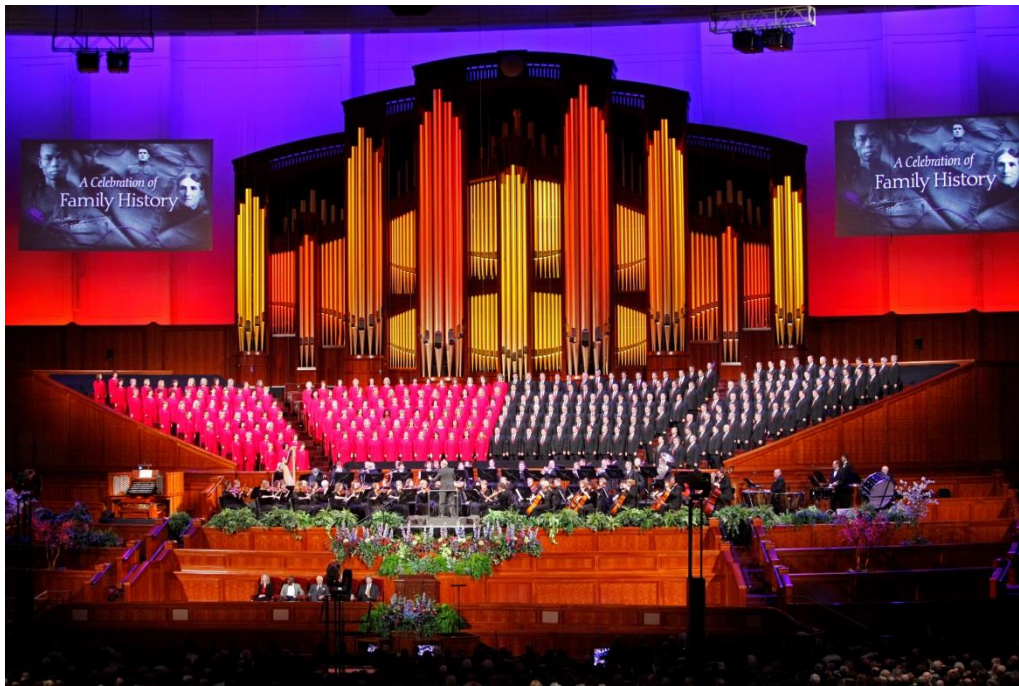
The department expanded its conference presence more completely at the FGS conference in 2005, held in Salt Lake City. Along with hosting a traditional booth, it installed 20 workstations in the vendor area for conference attendees to experience the FamilySearch indexing prototype. Greater numbers of department employees presented than had previously been the case.⁸⁹ The department asked its presenters at conferences to submit their presentations for review by instructional personnel in order to ensure the quality of presentation. If presenters had a PowerPoint as part of their presentation, it asked them to use branded color backgrounds. The department expected presenters to represent it well and professionally.

Beyond displays and presentations, the department delivered other content at conferences. For the 2007 IAJGS conference in Salt Lake City, it created a webpage on FamilySearch Internet identifying Jewish genealogical resources online. It published *Tracing Your Jewish Ancestors* to guide those with Jewish heritage to trace their lineages back to Europe, also available for download. This resource provided a step-by-step approach to tracing a Jewish lineage back to Europe.⁹⁰ Beginning in 2009, new indexes and images were delivered to “Record Search” and to its successor, the “Records” tab on FamilySearch beta, in connection with NGS conferences in order to make the genealogical community broadly aware of new material for research.⁹¹

NGS Conference, 2010

The department viewed the 2010 NGS conference in Salt Lake City as a special opportunity to influence the genealogical community. Because the Granite Mountain Vault is inaccessible to the public, Jay Verkler presented two videos in his keynote address, one a virtual tour of the vault and another an overview of the microfilming scanning process which took place there. In what was called the Gentech Hall, the department hosted many hands-on demonstrations of the products it had been developing for years, which generated lots of excitement and buzz. Conference attendance reached a record-setting 2,700.⁹²

At the conference, the department hosted a family history fireside, entitled the “Celebration of Family History,” held in the 21,000 seat Conference Center in Salt Lake City. The fireside included songs by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, featured President Henry B. Eyring of the



National Genealogical Society Event at Conference Center Courtesy The Church

First Presidency and David McCullough, a noted historian, and included a video presentation interlaced with four vignettes of people who discovered and honored their ancestors. The event was magical for many who attended. It ended with three standing ovations. Stephen Valentine, a department employee, recounted the reaction of his neighbor in the audience, a visitor with no genealogical background: “He shook my hand and patted my shoulder as though we were old friends. He thanked me personally for the entire evening and expressed the belief that the entire program must have been presented just for [him] and his wife. . . . He and his wife said that this evening was a highlight of their lives.”⁹³

Just prior to the conference, Shipley Munson, marketing director in the department, told employees that efforts over the last several years had resulted in a “significant shift in the genealogical community mindset toward FamilySearch.”⁹⁴ The 2010 NGS conference built on that momentum. Jay Verkler summarized the conference in a message to all staff: “Last week was a truly significant week in the world of genealogy. The NGS conference was attended by a record number of individuals, who by all counts were favorably impacted by FamilySearch’s participation. . . . In my role, I was blessed to hear hundreds of comments of thanks to the FamilySearch organization. . . . You made the week, as one attendee put it, a week she ‘hoped would never end.’”⁹⁵

RootsTech

Not only did the department support conferences, it also created them. In 2008, the department inaugurated the FamilySearch Developers Conference to demonstrate its full platform for software developers. Ransom Love stated the department's message at the conference: "industry needs are greater than any one entity can fulfill. In order to meet the tremendous



Opening Session of RootsTech 2011 Courtesy Brandon Flint

needs in the marketplace, industry professionals and companies will need to work closely and collaborate on tools, standards, authorities, initiatives, and interfaces that reduce duplication and maximize returns while satisfying the customer."⁹⁶



Roots Tech Exhibit Hall Courtesy Brandon Flint

In 2011, the department inaugurated the first RootsTech conference. With this conference, the department sought to bring together technology creators (developers and vendors) and technology users (genealogists and others) in a spirit of collaboration and innovation. This initiative came from collaboration between a user, David Rencher (a department leader and genealogist), and a technologist, Jay (director). The intent was to raise the technological level of the genealogical dialogue and bring a new generation imbued in technology into the

genealogical arena. They tested their ideas by sponsoring a Gentech Hall in the 2010 National

Genealogical Society conference in Salt Lake City. It generated such excitement that the department set about creating the new conference in seven months, much less time than traditionally needed to organize a major conference. Anne Roach served as the conference organizer.⁹⁷

The RootsTech conference was a runaway success. With 3,000 attendees on site and almost 5,000 attendees online, it ranked as one of the largest genealogy-related conferences ever held in the United States. Participants came from 42 states and 13 countries. Over 50,000 blogs or articles were posted online during the three weeks surrounding the conference. The participation of 17 official sponsors made the effort truly collaborative. Ninety percent of the attendees reported being very satisfied or satisfied with the conference.⁹⁸ The informal, participant-driven, discussion-focused forums were refreshingly engaging.⁹⁹ A professional participant wrote, “The consensus is in: last month’s RootsTech conference in Salt Lake was a game-changer for the field of genealogy.”¹⁰⁰

During the first decade of the 21st century, the department reasserted its leadership role in the genealogical community, not for any monetary gain but for the good of promoting free access to records and encouragement to all those pursuing the records of their ancestors. Its efforts engendered enthusiasm and energy broadly, elevating and energizing the discourse of those engaged in genealogical pursuit and inviting many more to join the dialogue.

Organizational Restructuring

Underpinning the developments described in this history, the department sought to realign its organization to accomplish the strategy of developing digital processes and supporting the Church worldwide. From 2000 to 2008, the Church combined the Family History Department and the Church History Department under a single Executive Director: first under Elder D. Todd Christofferson, then of the Seventy (who had been directing Family History since 1998), and later under Elder Marlin K. Jensen, also of the Seventy. Church leadership felt the two departments had a commonality of purpose, with both sides involved in collecting, organizing, preserving, and providing access to records.¹⁰¹ However, very little was integrated at lower levels of administration, with the single exception that the staff of microfilm processing at headquarters and the Granite Mountain Vault reported to the Church History side of the new department rather than the Family History side.

At the operational level, the two departments had little in common. While the names of both included the word *history*, their collections had only minimal overlap, and their objectives differed completely. When the issue was restudied and the decision made in 2008 to separate them, President Thomas S. Monson said simply, “Well, sometimes marriages just don’t work out, and when they don’t, we grant divorces.”¹⁰² The Church split Family History out and given new leadership while the top leadership went to the Church History side. Elder Marlin K. Jensen had previously been called as Church Historian and Richard E. Turley (the managing director of both Family and Church History from 1996 to 2008) was called as Assistant Church Historian.

Six years earlier, on April 30, 2002, as part of implementing the new strategy, Jay Verkler divided the into seven divisions, four of them revamped and three of them new. The new ones were:

- The Member Needs Division had the responsibility to understand the needs of members worldwide and see that those needs were met in the department's products, information, and support.
- The Records and Information Division provided ordinary members with records that were organized and usable and that met members' needs.
- Worldwide Support Services developed responsive solutions for priesthood leaders, members, and family history centers.

Among the revamped divisions, the greatest changes occurred in Product Engineering. Staffed primarily with new hires, this division sought to deliver quality, on-time products that met the needs of ordinary Church members and ensured that department systems ran continuously. In addition, the Acquisitions Division lost some staff to the Preservation Division, which was managed by the Church History side of the department, but it continued with the mission to ensure efficient, effective, and targeted acquisition of key record collections.¹⁰³

The Family History Library Division, including the library and the FamilySearch Center, did not initially fit into the strategy of delivering information digitally, but it remained the center of research expertise and assisted patrons coming to Salt Lake City.¹⁰⁴ With many years of experience in academia and having served in the department previously, Ray Wright brought significant background and understanding to his role as library director when he was appointed in 2004. He sought ways for his staff to demonstrate their value as the "heart of the domain expertise" in doing genealogical research.¹⁰⁵ Serving from 2004 to 2007, he integrated his staff into the work of other divisions, particularly Worldwide Support Services. As digital delivery systems came into being, division staff provided content for the Research Wiki and other strategic initiatives. Wright worked with Don Anderson, director of Worldwide Support Services, to plan and to pull together their personnel into an integrated team.¹⁰⁶ After Wright retired in March 2008, the department merged the Library and Worldwide Support divisions into a Patron Services Division.

The department added a new organizational structure in February 2010 called the Marketing Division, directed by Shipley Munson. It sought to more effectively attract the world to department products and services and foster communication and cooperation with other groups essential to developing a worldwide genealogical community.¹⁰⁷ This new division was the final major change before the end of 2011. With new leadership, strategies, and purposes, the organization will continue to evolve as the ancestral quest of the modern age continues.

Promoting the Common Good

The department saw the need to cooperate with others and market its products both to Church members and the genealogical community, fomenting growth and change for the benefit of all. Digital technology served as a common ground for many different players to assume roles and

contribute meaningfully to the overall good. The department emerged in the 21st century as a key player in the effort to support the worldwide interest in deriving meaning and identity from the ancestral past as a foundation for the future; at the same time recognizing that it remained one player among a host of others engaged in the grand adventure of detailing the grand landscape of relationships between human kind, parents and children, ancestors and descendants, families and individuals.

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¹⁰⁷FHD Communications to all employees, December 14, 2009; "Marketing Organization," February 1, 2010, internal FHD document.

Remembering 1995–2011

At the conclusion of the book *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, to which this history is an update, a paragraph portrays the future as envisioned in 1994: “As the Family History Department celebrates its centennial anniversary, almost fifty temples are in operation, and others are either being built or planned throughout the world. . . . Leaders in the Family History Department are planning even *greater efforts to make names available for temple work*. They envision more extensive international genealogical activity. They hope for a world in which educational resources on family history will become common in libraries and schools, and community groups will promote and support *family history as an activity that strengthens cultural, social, and familial ties*. *Sources will be preserved from loss or destruction by caring record custodians, who will make protected originals or copies increasingly accessible for researchers. A vast international network of trained volunteers will help the untrained develop their skills in the use of family history resources. Powerful, easy-to-use software programs—all sharing a common format for data exchange—will be widely available from diverse providers. The compiled record of all families, preserved in the Ancestral File or a more refined system, will be valued both in and out of the Church as the repository for the vital records of mankind and as the exchange place for ancestral information*” (italics added).

This history delineates the tapestry woven in fulfilling that future vision. Responding to the inquiry of an employee in 2011 about the difference between the department during his service in the late 1980s and the present, Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve responded, “From a covered wagon to a jet. The ability to perform the work, the scope of the work, the amount of the data . . . There is no comparison.”¹ The department expanded its services, revolutionizing the way in which it serves both Church members and the genealogical community. At the same time, it was but one of many players in an increasing diverse field of endeavor to unlock the ancestral past and piece it back together for the future. As noted in this history, it has taken advantage of digital technology to accomplish four purposes.

Create Order and Prepare Names. In 1994, the department supported name submission for 46 temples in an offline computer world that included numerous manual steps. The department did not anticipate that by 2010, 134 temples would be in operation around the world, three times the number in a tenth of the time it took to build the first 46. The “greater efforts to make names available for temple work” that was envisioned in 1994 at the end of the book *Hearts Turned to the Fathers* matured in 2009 with the worldwide delivery of new FamilySearch, through the unanticipated but wondrous technology of the Internet, which even now we have begun to take for granted. When the department delivered new FamilySearch (later Family Tree) it moved another step toward the vision of a “compiled record of all families . . . valued both in and out the Church . . . as the exchange place for ancestral information.”² This product represents millions of work hours over the last century as a beginning point for continuing the search in the digital age.

Records Access. The introduction noted that in 1994, the department acquired and distributed images solely on microfilm and indexed but did not digitize records, in 2011 it. The vision outlined in the *Hearts Turned to the Fathers* anticipated that “sources will be preserved from loss

or destruction . . . [and become] increasingly accessible for researchers.” By 2011, the department was delivering hundreds of millions of images and indexed names annually through the Historical Records component of FamilySearch.org. Concurrently, archives of the world increasingly delivered content over the Internet, sometimes in cooperation with commercial entities and sometimes freely. By 2011 the department had shifted into a continuous, concentrated effort to publish content at the far edge of its capacity to do so. According to Marilyn Foster, who sat in Family History leadership councils for many years, “A balance was achieved over time between the domain knowledge of the technologists and the genealogists, the expertise of the latter subsumed in the effort to push forward on the technology front.”³

Member and Genealogical Community Support. In 1994, the department supported Church members and the genealogical community offline programs and paper publications and minimally met the needs of its international audience. Since then, the vision outlined in *Hearts Turned to the Fathers* blossomed. “A vast international network of trained volunteers [that helps] the untrained develop their skills” is a reality in the form of the Worldwide Support network. Marilyn Foster commented, “Providing Family History support worldwide is a model program that makes use of local rather than headquarters resources in a way not previously done.”⁴ “Educational resources on family history” have become common through the Research Wiki and in online classes offered through FamilySearch.org, not to mention the wide array of websites maintained by the genealogical community to assist novices in beginning their research and to assist competent users increase their skills. The idea of “family history as an activity that strengthens cultural, social, and familial ties,” is seen in programs such as the 2010 broadcasts of *Who Do You Think You Are*, a worthy successor to *Roots* in 1976.

Collaboration and Marketing. The department in 1994 collaborated minimally with other institutions and exported its message through limited training and publicity efforts. The vision outlined in *Hearts Turned to the Fathers* foresaw “powerful, easy-to-use software programs . . . widely available from diverse providers.” This outcome has happened as family history is actively pursued, with a host of new technological innovations. The department supports this effort, with increased efforts at collaboration. This objective recognizes the fact that the department has limited resources and that cooperation provides more data faster to more researchers than proceeding alone.⁵

The department has a unique role in the development of family history for people inside and outside the Church. Joseph Smith, the first prophet of this dispensation, enunciated the spiritual mandate of family history toward the end of his ministry in 1844, “The greatest responsibility in this world that God has laid upon us is to seek after our dead.”⁶ The year before establishing the Genealogical Society of Utah, President Wilford Woodruff, in his prayer dedicating the Salt Lake Temple in 1893, invoked heavenly guidance in behalf of those seeking their ancestry to “open before them new avenues of information . . . [and] place in their hands the records of the past.”⁷

The department has increasingly used technology in accomplishing these tasks. The words of President Howard W. Hunter at the department centennial celebration held on November 13,

1994, still reverberate in the effort of the following 17 years. He said, “With regard to temple and family history work, I have one overriding message: This work must hasten. . . . The great work of the temples and all that supports it must expand. It is imperative!”⁸ Family history is about the fact that the ancestors are an important—even essential—part of who we are and who we will be in eternity. Technologists have begun to wield the power of the cyber world in behalf of those seeking to know, honor, and bless their predecessors.

¹Richard G. Scott, department devotional, April 28, 2011, author’s notes.

²Linda Robertson to all employees, email, May 3, 2011.

³Marilyn Foster, oral history, interviewed by Kahlile Mehr, Salt Lake City, Utah, August 12, 2008, 9.

⁴Marilyn Foster, oral history, 10.

⁵Marilyn Foster, oral history, 11.

⁶*History of the Church*, 6:312–13.

⁷Wilford Woodruff, “Salt Lake Temple Dedicatory Prayer,” April 6–24, 1893, “Temples of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” <http://www.ldschurchtemples.com/saltlake/prayer/>.

⁸Howard W. Hunter, “We Have a Work to Do,” *Ensign*, March 1995, 64.

Family History Time Line 1995–2011

- 1996.** *Ordinance Data Management System.* Collocated all ordinance data into a single database for eventual merging into new.FamilySearch.org.
- 1998–2001.** *Compact Disc Index Publications.* Published indexes to records on compact disc, beginning with a few small collections, followed by massive compilations—the British 1881 census in 1999 and the United States 1880 census in 2001.
- 1999.** *FamilySearch Internet.* Developed FamilySearch Internet, making a reality the goal of delivering family history information to the home.
- 1999–2000.** *New Temples.* The Church dedicated 49 temples, unprecedented then and unequalled since.
- 2000.** *Digital Camera Capture.* Began digital camera capture prototype in the National Archives of Scotland.
- 2003–2005.** *Digital Microfilm Scanning.* Began microfilm scanning, a process that it speeded up significantly in 2005 with ribbon-scanning technology.
- 2003–2007.** *Worldwide Support.* Implemented telephone and Internet technologies and engaged volunteer assistance (450 support missionaries in the United States and Canada and 350 elsewhere in the world by 2007), answering questions by phone or other forms of communication in 12 languages for members in 110 countries.
- 2005.** *FamilySearch Indexing.* Delivered FamilySearch indexing to engage the volunteer assistance of the genealogical community to index images of original records over the Internet.
- 2007–2010.** *new.FamilySearch.org.* Released a lineage-linked central ordinance file to the St. Louis Temple District in June 2007, and by 2010, the file was released to all temple districts worldwide.
- 2007.** *Historical Record Collections.* Delivered images and indexes over the Internet in a pilot known as Record Search, renamed Historical Record Collections in FamilySearch beta.
- 2008.** *FamilySearch Wiki.* Delivered the Research Wiki, which drew on the knowledge of the general public as well as Church resources to provide a single Internet source for family history research assistance.
- 2008–2011.** *Cooperative Efforts.* Developed relationships and completed projects with all significant commercial genealogical enterprises and many nonprofit organizations.
- 2010.** *FamilySearch.org.* Revamped FamilySearch.org (which from 2007 to 2010 was known as FamilySearch beta; anticipating the future incorporation of new.FamilySearch.org into the site, providing a single site for the Church’s family history databases and programs; converted to a production system in spring 2011).
- 2011.** *RootsTech.* Inaugural RootsTech Conference for genealogy and technology collaboration, with over 3,000 in-person attendees and 5,000 online attendees; the largest genealogical conference of the preceding decade.